

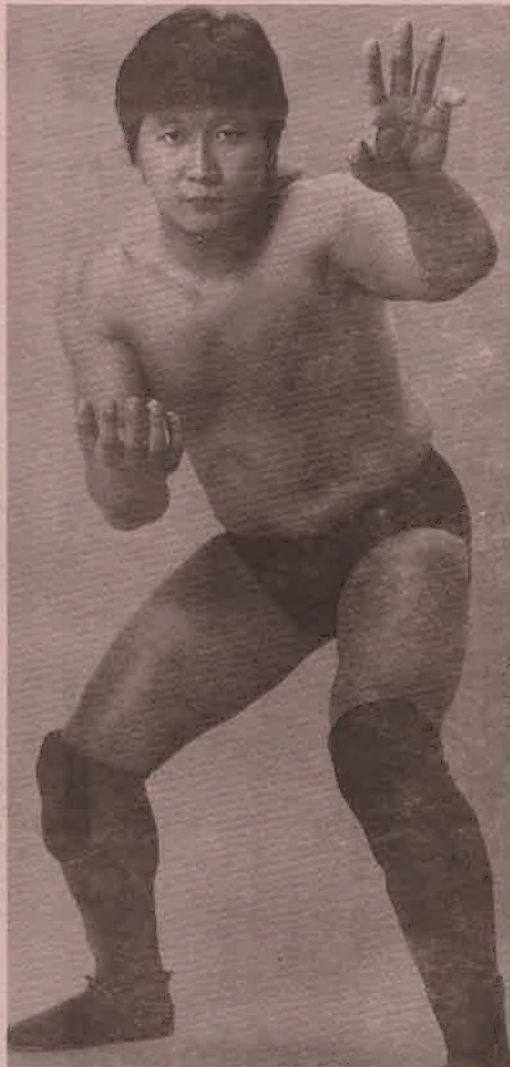
The Wrestling Observer Newsletter 1988 Yearbook

\$12.50

Dave Meltzer, Editor



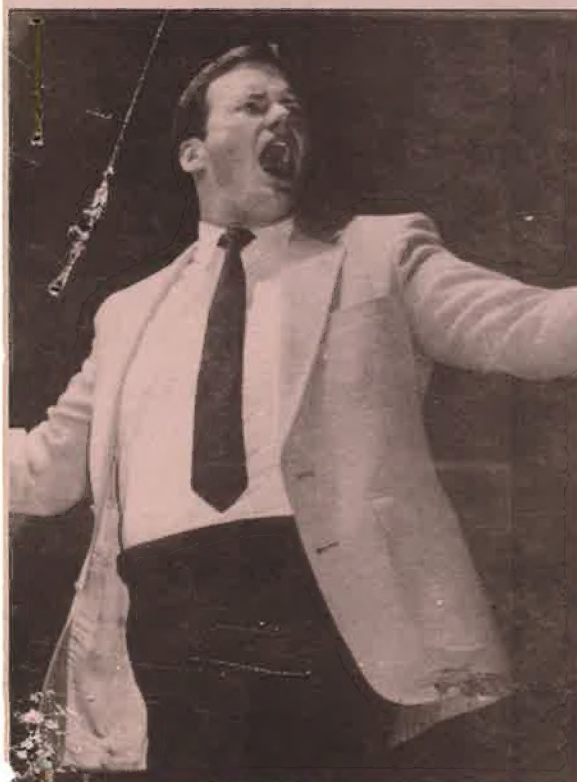
*Tatsumi Fujinami
Most Outstanding Wrestler*



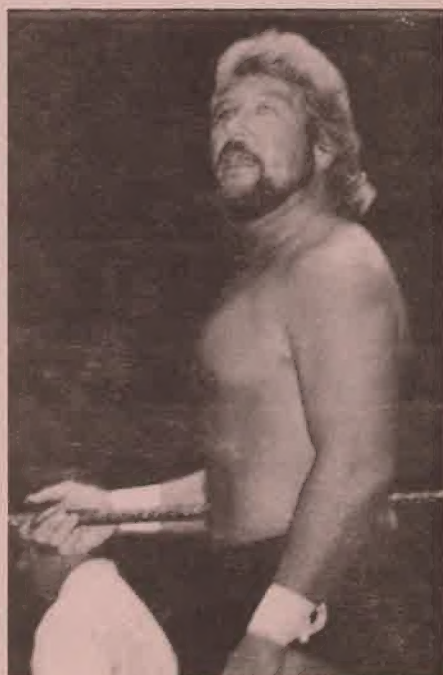
*Akira Maeda
Wrestler of the Year*



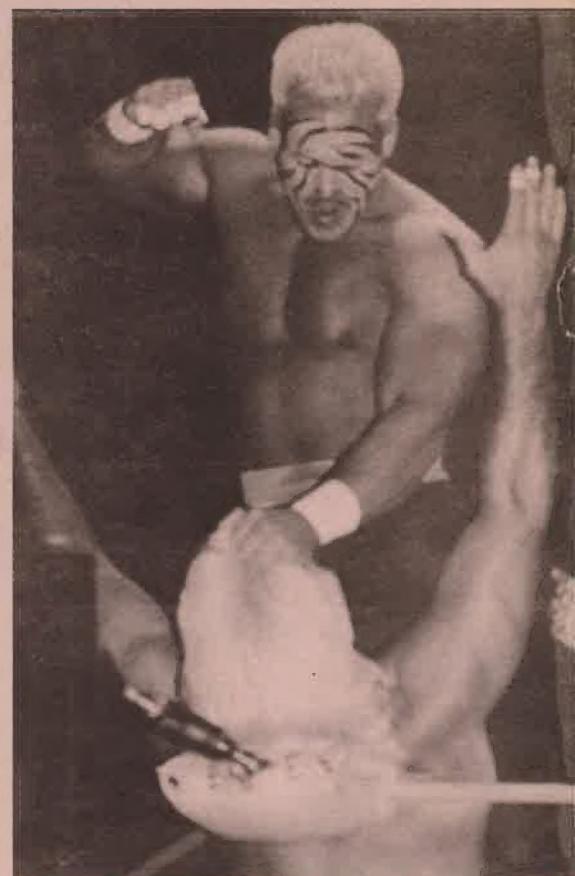
*Owen Hart
Best Flier*



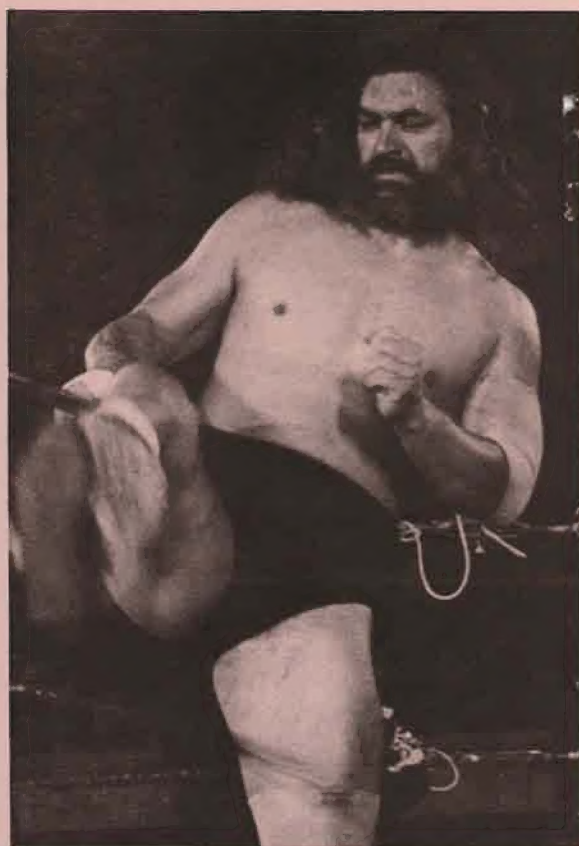
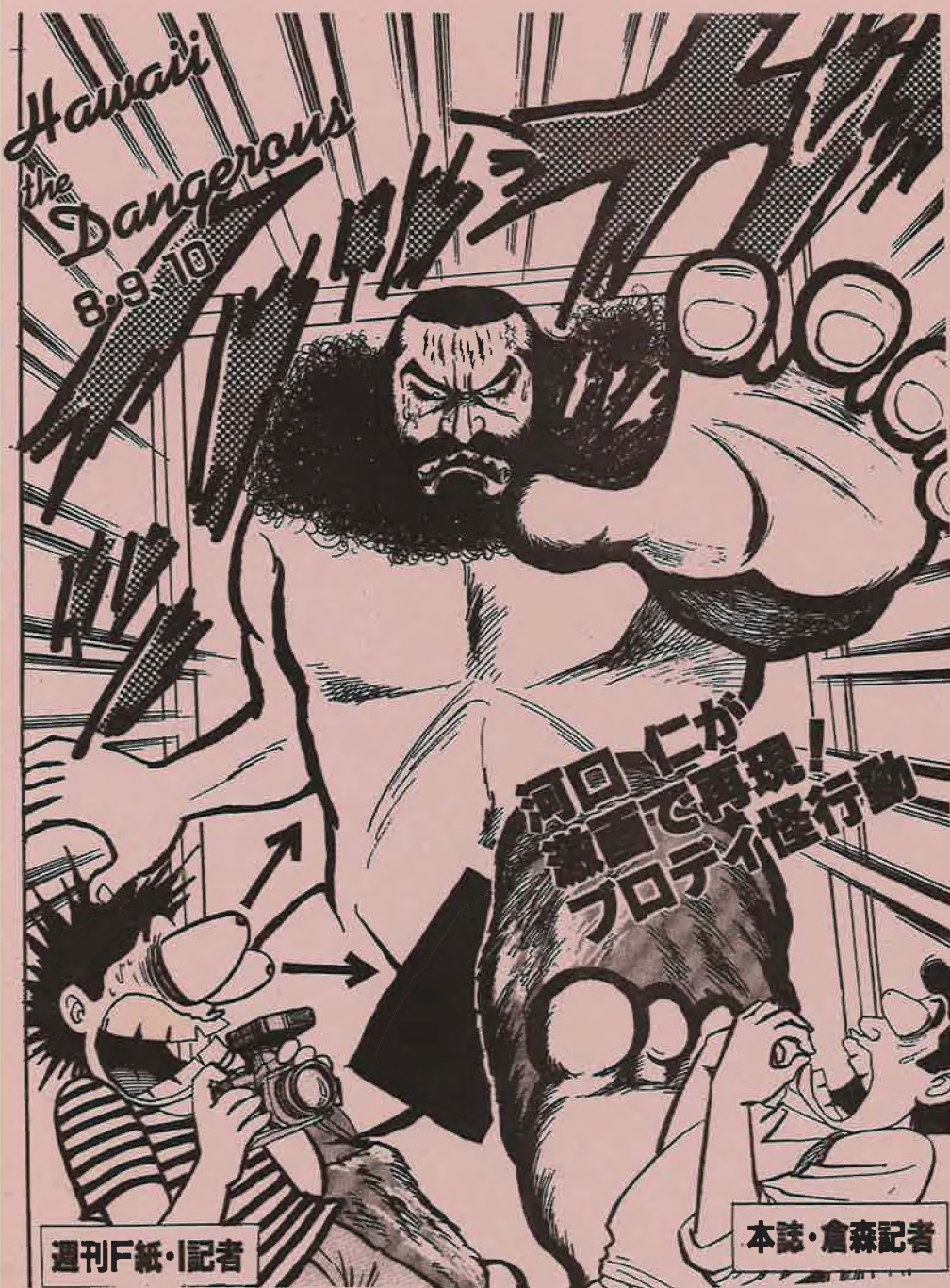
*Jim Cornette
Manager of the Year
Best on Interviews*



*Ted DiBiase
Best Heel*



*"Sting" vs. Ric Flair
Match of the Year*



This Book dedicated to the Family, Friends and Fans
of Frank Goodish "Bruiser Brody"

THE WRESTLING OBSERVER NEWSLETTER'S
1988 YEAR BOOK

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TOP WRESTLING NEWS STORIES OF 1988

When 1988 is looked back on in the years to come, there are several things which may be remembered.

This past year wasn't the first year of pay-per-view television, but it was the first year of wide-spread pay-per-view with several promotions involved. It has long been talked about in many sports that the future would be in pay-per-view, because the income potential is outrageous and almost unlimited.

And it was Titan Sports, a wrestling promotion, which got the jump on all the other sports in pay-per-view with its Wrestlemania III promotion, which was the first eight-figure gross garnered in the pay-per-view industry.

While Wrestlemania III's record for pay-per-view income was shattered this past year by the Mike Tyson vs. Michael Spinks boxing match, Titan Sports ran three pay-per-view wrestling shows over the past year, all of which were profitable. While none approached the buy rate of the Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan extravaganza from Pontiac, MI, which also drew a live crowd of 90,817 paid and \$1,599,000, both of which remain all-time records for the business, Titan's wrestling on pay-per-view is still consistently more successful than anything on pay-per-view except for the occasional blockbuster boxing match.

Titan's rival, the National Wrestling Alliance, also ran three pay-per-view events this past year, while a combined effort of Verne Gagne's American Wrestling Association, Jerry Jarrett's two promotions, the Championship Wrestling Association and World Class Championship Wrestling and David McLane's Powerful Women of Wrestling got its feet wet with a December show.

Titan got its feet wet as well, with its promoter, Vince McMahon, reputed to be worth \$100 million in a Forbes Magazine article, expanding into several new arenas. First, McMahon, along with Dick Ebersole, were responsible for helping put together a late-night talk show featuring sportscaster Bob Costas on the NBC network. McMahon and Ebersole had teamed up for several years to do the Saturday Night Main Event, a five-time-per-year late-night special which continues to be a smashing success in the ratings. McMahon also has ventured into the movie business with a \$20 million production called, "No Holds Barred," starring his top wrestling attraction, Terry Bollea, better known as Hulk Hogan, who plays a character based upon his pro wrestling character. The movie is to be released this coming spring. And finally, McMahon ventured into the boxing business, buying the pay-per-view rights to the Sugar Ray Leonard vs. Donny Lalonde title fight for a reported \$9.5 million. Despite Titan's best efforts at hyping this fight to its wrestling audience, the best estimates are Titan lost in the neighborhood of \$4.7 million on the venture.

While all sorts of news was occurring on what may turn into wrestling's future battlefield, the biggest news story in pro wrestling didn't occur on television. It didn't occur in the ring. It didn't even occur in the United States, or even Japan. It occurred in the bathroom of a dressing room in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, when Frank Goodish, a pro wrestling legend better known as Bruiser Brody, was stabbed

to death by another wrestler. The trial of Jose Gonzales, better known in wrestling as Invader #1, was to begin in January of 1989, although nearly as strange as the incident itself has been the aftermath, a curious case of unexplained questions that have caused speculation as to the why's of the death to run rampant.

1988 was the year of many changes within the hierarchy of professional wrestling. As the ante has grown to operate wrestling promotions, mainly due to the strides made by Titan Sports, smaller promotions, that had often been run by wrestlers themselves, had fallen by the wayside.

Many would say that the Pro Wrestling War, started in 1984, for all real purposes was decided on Thanksgiving of 1987. On that night, Titan Sports and Vince McMahon successfully sabotaged rival Jim Crockett Promotions' leading event of the year, Starrcade. McMahon ran a card of his own, the first Survivors Series, and by most accounts, not only kept Crockett off pay-per-view except in five markets, but outdid the NWA even when it came to presenting an overall live show. It had been considered to be the NWA's one strong point in competition with Titan was its better quality house shows.

It is true that Crockett got a good measure of revenge back on March 27, when he presented his first Clash of the Champions as a free card on WTBS, head-to-head with Titan's Wrestlemania, and by most accounts, produced a far better card and actually had a much larger viewing audience. But the NWA's total failure to capitalize on its success that day made it a one-day success story which had no bearing on the overall picture.

By the end of the year, Crockett was no longer in control of the NWA, having sold the company to Turner Broadcasting, the owners of TBS, the flagship television station of the NWA. It was the first step in the U.S. wrestling scene winding up like Japan, with the wrestling promotions actually controlled by the television industry.

McMahon's Titan Sports, in all reality, is now a media corporation rather than a wrestling promotion, and the NWA will follow in the same footsteps in 1989.

On the smaller scene, bad promoting and bad houses finally finished off the Von Erich regime running World Class Championship Wrestling. The World Class office can be credited in many ways for pioneering certain aspects of wrestling. It was the first promotion to score big with the teenage audience, by cultivating young talent as its major draws in 1983, a concept McMahon realized was important and expanded upon the following year. It incorporated entrance music, which McMahon took five steps farther a few years down the road, and had the highest production values of any wrestling show on television. These advantages gave it the first nationally syndicated wrestling network, but it was never able to capitalize on its early national following. World Class acted too slow, and the truth is, even if it had acted upon its success of 1983 and 1984, they eventually would have self-destructed any-

way. By 1988, World Class was a minor league office, barely capable of sustaining itself and trying to build once again around Kerry Von Erich, who had returned to action following a crippling motorcycle accident and an 18-month hiatus from the ring. While Von Erich's comeback may have been heroic in nature, he never could re-establish himself as any kind of a drawing card and the promotion fell deeply into debt. As a last ditch try to save the business, the Von Erich family turned controlling interest over to Jerry Jarrett, the long-time owner of Jarrett Promotions, which had run a strong regional outfit in Tennessee and Kentucky, which had also withered away against the competition of the big boys.

Another entrance to wrestling by a media combine was in Alabama, when David Woods, owner of Montgomery-based television station WCOV, purchased Continental Championship Wrestling from Ron Fuller for a reported \$165,000. Nobody expected Woods to have much success in reviving a territory which was nearly dormant, and things were running along at a nearly-dead level when Eddie Gilbert was brought in to book the territory. There was some initial success, and the organization gained a small cult following from its shows on the FNN/Score cable network. Woods then purchased rights to promote in Knoxville and Chattanooga from Fuller, whose own attempt at forming a USA wrestling promotion based in those two cities failed miserably. But all sorts of creative, business and mainly personal differences between Woods and Gilbert ended up with a splitting of the ways, and in almost record-time, the new Continental Federation plummeted to new depths.

While many wrestling fans, and most wrestling magazines, have long traditionally referred to the NWA, AWA and WWF as the three major alliances, the AWA had fallen from major league status a few years back. Its lone saving grace was a contract with ESPN, which gave it national exposure, But it didn't have a product which could draw nationally, and the decision was made earlier in the year to stop promoting house shows. The AWA mainly became a booking office. It promoted monthly television tapings in Las Vegas, and through the efforts of mainly Rob Russen, sold shows to local sponsors. Most wrestlers who worked for the AWA considered two shots a week heavy bookings. The group lost its major attractions, Curt Hennig and the Midnight Rockers, both to the WWF (in reality, the split with the Rockers occurred prior to their joining Titan), and its champion, Jerry Lawler, was based out of another territory. Still, the AWA remained in business, albeit on a small scale, and are of no national significance as the year came to a close.

As for what worked in 1988, it was a year of extremes. The only two promotions which had major success over the past year had the two most widely divergent products.

Of course the No. 1 promotion on North American shores was Titan Sports. The World Wrestling Federation remained cartoonish in its approach to product, with even heavier reliance this past year on steroid-laced comic book heroes as its cornerstone. While the promotion added some of the top wrestling talent in the world to its roster, none of the highly-rated newcomers, without heavy dosages of the juice, was given the opportunity at stardom.

The exact opposite happened in Japan. The No. 1 success story in pro wrestling, and the most unexpected, was Akira Maeda and his Universal Wrestling Federation. Maeda was fired by New Japan Pro Wrestling, for failure to accept the punishment imposed upon him for his legendary "shoot-kick," a sucker kick from behind to the eye of Riki Choshu which broke two bones. He then formed his own company, and with the "aura" of being the wrestler who was fired for fighting for real, brought two of New Japan's minor stars, Nobuhiko Takada and Kazuo Yamazaki, both of whom worked with Maeda in the original UWF, which had a cult following in 1984-85 before going under, and sold out monthly shows for the remainder of the year, some in less than an hour. The UWF fans became legendary, as thousands would camp out at the box offices the day before tickets would go on sale in order to get the choice seats. Proof that the UWF was "for real" took place in late June, when in six hours, all 12,000 seats for its third card, an August 13 show at Ariake Coliseum in the Tokyo Bay Area were sold out for a \$500,000 live gate, one of the 10 largest gates of all-time, and accomplished without any television exposure.

The UWF ran without gimmicks and showmanship. Many thought the style would be too boring for the general public. Many thought the early success was nothing more than a novelty. However, the promotion's power got stronger, not weaker, as the year went on. While the UWF isn't any more real than the WWF, its approach to make it look like legit sport proved to be a winner.

So here are the 10 leading news stories of 1988 as voted by our impromptu editorial board:

1. BRUISER BRODY STABBED TO DEATH IN PUERTO RICAN DRESSING ROOM

It takes years to establish a legend. On the surface, it seems like it only takes moments to wipe it out.

But in the years to come, the name Bruiser Brody will be remembered within the wrestling business, possibly in more reverent terms than the man himself, Frank Goodish, deserved.

Brody will be remembered as the greatest brawling wrestler in the history of the business, a label few would deny him. He'll be remembered as the greatest all-around working "big-man" in the history of the sport, probably long after several actually surpassed the impressive standard he set. He'll be remembered for his unique character, "The Intelligent Monster," as he was known in Japan. He'll be remembered for his chain swinging, his barking, his pragmatic attitude on the wrestling business, his stubbornness, his athletic ability, his great matches, his international success, and his toughness. And as much as all that, he may best be remembered for his death, perhaps pro wrestling's biggest international news event of the past decade.

Frank Goodish a.k.a. Bruiser Brody died at the age of 42 on the operating table at 4:30 a.m. on July 17 at a hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The night before, prior to a wrestling card at nearby Bayamon Stadium, Goodish was stabbed

three times, allegedly by another wrestler, Jose Huertas Gonzales, the booker and co-owner of the promotion.

What at first was thought to be a case of a booker over-reacting because of past bad blood or because of Brody's legendary reputation for being unwilling to do jobs unless things were "right," has turned into wrestling's version of the JFK assassination. Theories abound, most of which hold no water. The police investigation has been surprisingly haphazard, and has revealed nothing. It is expected the suspect will plea bargain down to a lesser charge, although if witnesses fail to appear, as expected, Gonzales may be declared innocent by reasons of self defense.

2. TBS PURCHASES CONTROLLING INTEREST IN NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

It was long expected that as wrestling gained in public perception and marketability, that the big boys would take over.

But the big boy, in this case, Ted Turner, took over more because of the failure of Jim Crockett.

Crockett, part-owner and President of Jim Crockett Promotions, had been the controlling force behind Mid-Atlantic Wrestling since his father's death more than a decade ago. With the luck of cultivating Ric Flair, the best all-around performer of the era, Crockett managed to take his company into the position as the leading promotion, and later, the only promotion, in the formerly world-wide National Wrestling Alliance.

With the regional offices getting weaker and weaker, Crockett, through booker Dusty Rhodes, felt expansion into a national promotion was necessary for long-term survival. Upon acquisition of the TBS television contract in 1985 from Vince McMahon in a reported \$1 million deal, Crockett made plans to follow McMahon's lead into the national sphere.

Several problems were evident from the start. First, McMahon, in going first, had both the novelty run and a head-start. Second, McMahon, based near New York City, had a giant media advantage on the Charlotte-based Crockett. Third, McMahon hired a large front office, most of which consisted of those with other business backgrounds and not ex-wrestlers to do national marketing. And since McMahon marketed better and drew better, he could afford to pay better. It made Crockett vulnerable to losing talent left-and-right, which is what was happening a few years back.

There are several factors which led to the fall of Jim Crockett Promotions. Most of the blame has been placed in the direction of Rhodes, the booker, whose unrelenting push of himself as the top baby face of the promotion held back younger and more marketable stars. He is also blamed for keeping the potential leading drawing card, Flair, in a role as a heel champion who never won, which destroyed Flair and the belt as a draw because of the staleness of the routine. Another factor was the purchase of Bill Watts' Universal Wrestling Federation in April of 1987. With the acquisition of the UWF, Crockett had a talent base nearly as large as McMahon's, and actually one more marketable. He also had a television network nearly as large. However, he didn't have the promotional muscle to turn that into a

business large enough to sustain the costs of either the television, or the large stable. Things were made worse when the marketable new faces were "destroyed" by Rhodes and Crockett in an ego-game to "prove" the NWA was a better promotion than the UWF. Another factor, which hasn't been touched upon, is the enormous salaries Crockett signed his wrestlers to in order to keep them from leaving for McMahon.

In particular, Rhodes, Flair, The Road Warriors with manager Paul Ellering and Lex Luger were signed to exorbitant deals that JCP's income couldn't sustain. Crockett had been advised that these contracts could be paid for through television advertising revenue, which never came close to projections, and the potential income of pay-per-view, which McMahon sabotaged early, and later pay-per-view events didn't draw as well as Crockett's advisers had projected.

Deeply in debt and on the verge of closing down operations, Crockett started taking out huge loans. Finally, Jim Barnett arranged to meetings to be held for TBS to buy the company. The negotiations, which began in July, dragged on until November, which caused four months of further eroding of interest in the product.

Once the purchase was made, with a rumored sale price of \$9 million for 65 percent interest in the NWA, the parent company was changed to being called the Universal Wrestling Corporation, a subsidiary of Turner Broadcasting. Jack Petrik was put in charge, with Crockett announced as handling day-to-day affairs, although the wheels had already been put into motion for Petrik to bring in Jim Herd, a fellow former television executive from St. Louis, to run daily operations.

Make no mistake about it, the NWA enters 1989 in a crisis situation, even with new ownership. Declining house show gates put the new company into a negative cash flow state almost immediately, especially since they are actually paying the wrestlers what their contracts specified, unlike Crockett. The promotion still has to regain the interest of the television viewers, improve its syndication, and limit the no-shows and screw-job endings which have crippled house show gates.

3. UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION FORMS, BECOMES HOTTEST PROMOTION

There are certain rules about promoting pro wrestling.

First, everything revolves around television. Without television, forget it.

Second, wrestling itself doesn't draw. There's nothing more boring than two people exchanging holds. Gimmicks draw. Outrageous characters draw. Personalities draw. Showmanship draws.

Third, you can't decisively beat main eventers without destroying their heat. Especially the top baby face in the promotion can't do a clean job.

Enter the Universal Wrestling Federation. No television. No gimmicks, except perhaps the greatest gimmick of all, wrestling as pure sport. No showmanship. No outrageous personalities.

Clean finishes in every match, and everyone does clean jobs, even the promotion's superstar.

A recipe for disaster? Hardly. It was the recipe for the hottest promotion of 1988.

The truth is, when the UWF was formed in April, few in Japan, even amongst the hardcore fans left-over from the old UWF, felt the group wouldn't have much of a chance to make it. Interest in wrestling had been on the decline since its peak in Japan from 1982-84. Both major promotions were bumped off of prime-time television.

Starting of a new group may not have been suicidal, but the headstrong way everyone knew Akira Maeda would go about it sounded like it had little chance of success.

The UWF, with only three wrestlers with any name value, two of which were ultra-talented, but kept as mid-level performers by New Japan, the other fired from New Japan earlier in the year stemming from the November "shoot-kick," sold out every card it promoted in 1988.

It opened on May 12 in Tokyo, but the real story took place about a month earlier, when tickets went on sale. All 2,000 tickets for the Korauken Hall show sold out in 15 minutes with long lines at all three ticket outlets. While a major news story and impressive, most didn't realize the impact of what had happened. For one, the old UWF had a large cult following in Tokyo to begin with. In fact, many felt in 1984-85 that in Tokyo itself, the UWF was as hot as its rival All Japan and New Japan promotions, both of which were far more popular then than they are now. Everyone knew the debut card would be sold out anyway. It was the third card, on August 13, which sold out in six hours for a Tokyo show in which it was reported that 10,000 were turned away the first day alone because of the quick sellout that people began realizing the impact the UWF had on the Japan wrestling scene.

The rival promotions started running angles to look more legitimate. Both groups started phasing out the crazy high spot style and high flying which was the trademark of Japanese wrestling this decade in favor of a more realistic style based on submission moves and exchanging holds. The brawling was stiffer and more realistic. Realism was demanded throughout all the promotions.

Not content to rest on its laurels, on November 10 in Tsuyhashi, for a card which sold out all 5,000 seats in just 40 minutes, Maeda, the promotion's biggest star who had become one of the nation's most popular sports heroes by this time, did a clean knockout job to Nobuhiko Takada. It was a risky move since Maeda's popularity was on the rise, and was the main factor in the group's success. But it was felt for long-term survival, egos and invincibility had to be put aside for realism, and creating a second Maeda in Takada was the goal. When Takada then defeated Bob Backlund via submission on the December 22 show in Osaka, the creation of the second Maeda was complete.

As 1989 approaches, Maeda and Takada are signed for the group's most ambitious promotion yet. It's the first closed-circuit pro wrestling event ever in Japan, in fact, it's the first closed-circuit event of any kind in the Orient. The show, emanating from

Budokan Hall, a large Tokyo hall which has only sold out once for pro wrestling in the past decade, had all advanced tickets gone nearly two weeks before showtime.

4. U.S. PRO WRESTLING HITS NETWORK PRIME TIME

It had been 33 years since pro wrestling had last been seen on network prime-time television in the United States when NBC, stemming from the success of its Saturday Night's Main Event, took the plunge this past February.

The results. Satisfying for the network, but hardly spectacular. For the WWF, the initial outlook of it being the greatest event in its history was tempered by a lukewarm follow-up reaction and disappointing Wrestlemania.

But NBC was happy enough to try again next year, and probably for several years after.

Officially, the live February 5 Friday night 8 to 9 p.m. Eastern time slot show featuring Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan gained a disputed victory in the three network prime-time race. The Nielsen ratings judged the show a winner in the time slot, drawing a 15.2 rating and a 25 share, good for No. 31 out of 66 shows that week and barely nipping CBS' entry, "Beauty and The Beast." Arbitron gave "Beauty and the Beast" the time slot win with a 15.1 rating, while the "Main Event" in Arbitron figures scored a 14.8 and a 23 share. Even in second place, it was the best showing NBC had in that time slot, the weakest in its schedule, up until then in the season.

Overall, the audience of 33 million was slightly lower than the network had projected publicly earlier in the week. Titan, with characteristic modesty, predicted the show would be the highest rated special of the entire season.

But it was hardly a failure. While Titan proved that even with its hottest attraction possible, Andre vs. Hogan, that it didn't have the mainstream appeal to be a prime time hit, it also proved it had enough appeal to boost a weak time slot into a winning time slot.

The show itself featured the most-watched pro wrestling match in history in this country, the Andre vs. Hogan battle for the WWF title with the infamous twin referee finish. While Andre's victory was no secret, in fact several newspapers reported the fact before-hand, the ending came as a complete shock to almost everyone. The match ended with Andre giving Hogan the worst-looking suplex in the history of the business, and Hogan kicking out at one. However ref Earl Hebner, billed as Dave Hebner, who had just been brought in from the NWA for the angle a few days earlier, counted the pinfall and the title change. As the program went off the air, Andre then "sold" the WWF title to Ted DiBiase, which was later overruled to set up the tournament at Wrestlemania IV. At the same time, the nation was distracted and flabbergasted by watching the twin Hebner brothers argue in mid-ring.

In the other event on the card, Honkeytonk Man refused to do a job and give up his Interconti-

mental title to Randy Savage, so the future-WWF champion wound up with a count out victory.

5. SUPER SUNDAY: WRESTLEMANIA VS. THE CLASH

The biggest day for pro wrestling in the United States this past year was Super Sunday, March 27, when the NWA presented its first TBS Clash of the Champions special on free television, head-to-head with Wrestlemania, Titan Sports' annual megashow.

The not-so-coincidental showdown was the third of such affairs. In the first, Titan, with the first Survivors Series, virtually kept the NWA off of pay-per-view by scheduling an event head-to-head on the NWA's traditional Thanksgiving Starcade date.

The second, just two months earlier, pitted Crockett's first national pay-per-view event, the finals of the Bunkhouse Stampede, which Titan countered head-to-head with a live USA network special from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada called The Royal Rumble. Once again, Titan came out the winner, both in producing the superior show, and in knocking off some significant pay-per-view points away from the NWA. For the record, the Royal Rumble, which drew an 8.2 rating, was one of the highest rated shows in the history of cable television and the highest rated in both pro wrestling and USA network history.

As two-time losers, some questioned the sanity of the NWA in challenging Titan on its biggest day of the year. But March 27 was one day that the tables turned.

Wrestlemania was hardly the success expected, either in terms of a live show, or in terms of financial. While the event overall grossed between \$17 and \$20 million and was very profitable, the figures were way off Titan's pre-match projections of a \$30.5 million show. The show itself may have been the biggest egg laid in Titan's history. Two problems were evident. The first was the over-reliance of steroid usage among Titan's top guys made it almost impossible to work fast-paced singles matches, as the tournament necessitated. Second, while the live event in Atlantic City was a smashing financial success, the crowd that attended for the most part didn't appear to enjoy themselves and didn't react to much of anything, save Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant, all night long. The dead atmosphere combined with mainly weak matches were a marked contrast to the NWA's show, which had a lively atmosphere, three exceptional matches and was considered by a lot of people as the best big card of the year.

The Clash drew a 5.8 national rating (2,560,000 homes), although the rating grew and peaked at a 7.8 during the final 15 minutes of the Ric Flair vs. Sting main event, or some 3,431,000 households and probably seven to eight million viewers. Of course it was a free show and was available more readily than Titan's pay-per-view show. Titan's actual audience was approximately 650,000 homes on pay-per-view, which was probably around two million viewers, plus another 220,000 viewing on closed-circuit television throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Still, over the long haul, even with its best big show ever and Titan's worst, even with far more viewers, the NWA still got lost in the media shuffle. While most news programs ignored the existence of both, those that covered anything, covered Wrestlemania,

although part of the reason was a note in the WWF magazine that had been released a few weeks earlier that Randy Savage was champion, which he turned out to be. Still, Gene Okerlund at a post-card press conference said the event had been viewed by 30 million viewers, while USA Today said Wrestlemania had been viewed by an even more ridiculous 50 million viewers in something like three dozen countries (in reality, the show was available live only in the U.S. and Canada, but did air several months later on free television in places like Australia and South America).

When the NWA tried to brag about being in two-and-half million households that same day, it seemed like small change.

Wrestlemania was headlined by a tournament for the vacant WWF title, which stemmed from the NBC special on February 5. In the finals, after Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan were disqualified in a preliminary match, Randy Savage was crowned champion as he pinned Ted DiBiase after Hogan hit DiBiase with a chair. Also, Rick Martel & Tito Santana dropped the WWF tag belts to Demolition.

On the NWA side, the first Clash of the Champions saw the creation of a new superstar, Sting, which, unfortunately, wasn't realized by the NWA, or perhaps was, but wasn't utilized correctly. In holding Ric Flair to a 45 minute draw in what was not only the most-watched match in NWA history, but also voted Match of the Year in the Observer poll, Sting rode a giant wave of momentum which catapulted him into the position of being the most popular new star to come along since Randy Savage and the Road Warriors.

Other highlights of the first clash were Barry Windham & Lex Luger capturing the NWA tag team titles from Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson, and a tremendous brawl in which The Midnight Express beat The Fantastics via DQ with the famed Dusty screw-job finish in the match which finished second in Match of the Year balloting.

6. CANADIAN WILDMAN ADRIAN ADONIS AND PAT KELLY DIE IN AUTO ACCIDENT

The other major tragic news story of 1988 involved the death of three wrestlers, most notable of whom was Adrian Adonis, in an auto accident on July 4 near Gander, Newfoundland.

Adonis, 34, whose real name was Keith Franke of Bakersfield, California, had been a major international star this entire decade. While Adonis was best-known by most U.S. fans for his preposterous obese gay act, as "Adorable Adrian," earlier in the decade he had been regarded as one of the game's most talented performers, particularly in 1983 when his work was on par with anyone in wrestling.

Adonis was a regional headliner from early in his career, with stints on top in British Columbia, West Texas, Southern California (as "Gorgeous" Keith Franks) and the Pacific Northwest.

He gained national acclaim when the decade began for his long-run as AWA tag team champion with Jesse Ventura. He had his first successful stint in the WWF in 1982, which included some excellent matches with then-champion Bob Backlund. He also started touring Japan that same year, first managed by Fred Blassie and later as a tag team partner with Dick Murdoch as the "Super Violence Combination."

At one point in his career, Adonis held a minor World title sponsored by Joe Blanchard's soon-to-be-defunct Southwest Championship Wrestling, which was somewhat known nationally because of its slot on the USA cable network. Adonis actually quit the promotion without losing the title, and wound up dividing time between the WWF and Japan, with Murdoch as partner, holding both the WWF tag team title and New Japan's International tag team title simultaneously at one point.

When his career began faltering in 1986, mainly due to a weight problem, Adonis took on the gay gimmick upon directives from Vince McMahon Jr., which gave him his greatest notoriety, but also served to destroy his reputation as a tough wrestler in the U.S.

While Adonis was best-known for his feud with Roddy Piper, the feud itself was considered a flop at the box office. Adonis was fired once due to disciplinary problems, rehired, lost the hair match with Piper as part of the famous Wrestlemania III card at the Silverdome, and was fired once again.

From that point on, his career never really got back into gear. He disappeared for a few months, then hooked on with the AWA, using the gay gimmick, despite Verne Gagne's efforts for him to go back to his old leather gimmick. His weight ballooned, probably over the 400 pound mark. His stamina was non-existent, even though remnants of his natural talent still broke through from time-to-time.

In January of 1988, just before he was scheduled to leave for his first Japanese tour in a few years, Adonis broke his ankle in Minot, North Dakota at an AWA television taping. That meant four more months on the shelf, before returning to Japan in late May.

Adonis had lost weight in the interim, although he still weighed in the 330-340 range. He dropped the gay gimmick, went back to his old style that made him popular in Japan. While the Japanese fans were shocked at his weight gain, his work on tour was quite good and he did appear to be on the verge of making a comeback. He was signed up to team with Dick Murdoch in this year's tag team tournament, and it appeared he has regained some of his old form.

Just one week after the Japan tour ended, while touring for The Canadian Wildman (David McKigney) on an Eastern Canada tour, the van he was riding in, driven by wrestler Pat Kelly (William Arko), drove off the road to avoid a moose and went into a lake. Adonis was thrown from the car and died later in the hospital.

McKigney, 56, also known as the Canadian Wildman and The Bear Man, was a long-time independent promoter in Canada, mainly in Northern Ontario, and was the subject of the book "Drawing Heat" by Jim Freedman. He was best known in the 1970s for

training bears to wrestle, and for the tragic incident in which one of his trained bears escaped for its cage and killed his fiance.

7. JARRETT TAKES OVER WORLD CLASS WRESTLING

Probably no match in the history of wrestling has been seen as many times as the famous Kerry Von Erich NWA title victory over Ric Flair from Texas Stadium in 1984.

It was the apex of World Class wrestling. Some 32,123 fans paid \$402,000; at the time it was the fourth largest live crowd and second largest live gate in the history of North American pro wrestling. And Kerry Von Erich, and his wrestling brothers Kevin and Mike were thought to be the wrestlers that would dominate the decade.

Things didn't turn out that way. The tragedy and fall of the house of Von Erich has been well documented elsewhere, but the final fall came in October when the family was forced to give up its majority share in the business, in order to save the business, and give up control to Jerry Jarrett.

As part of the deal, Kevin and Kerry, who owned two-thirds of the promotion with Ken Mantell owning the other third, had their slice of the business cut to 40 percent and their influence cut to zero percent as part of the deal.

While initially the changes brought about by Jarrett have breathed new life into the promotion and saved the television slot on Channel 11, which was in grave jeopardy of falling into NWA hands, they did lose the key Channel 39 slot which had been a fixture in the Dallas market for several years.

The Jarrett philosophy of wrestling, with an emphasis on action, run-ins and unpredictability for the fans, but low payoffs for the wrestlers, then went into effect. Whether Jarrett will be able to save the promotion is a question that will be answered in the next few years.

8. DUSTY RHODES REPLACED AS NWA BOOKER

With the NWA's failing financial fortunes in 1988, the man under the most heat was booker Dusty Rhodes.

While some of the NWA's problems were based on outside forces, such as the television advertising revenue being perhaps half of what was projected and pay-per-view television not being nearly as profitable as the company expected, it can't be ignored that house show gates were weak for much of the year.

Rhodes' weaknesses as booker have been well documented. While Rhodes brought to the NWA a crew of talent which skyrocketed the promotion in 1986, and the television was basically creative, he stood pat for too long and the seeds of the falling out were evident by the summer of 1987.

During that summer, shortly after the UWF purchase, in an inexplicable business move, Rhodes "buried" the former UWF employees and with the exception of Sting and Rick Steiner, all

either were fired or had quit by January of 1988. The television shows were also changed to an all-squash format of 30 second matches and 60 second interviews, which caused massive ratings drops and led to upset advertisers.

Keeping the same clique at the top led to stagnation of the promotion. The handling of the World champion, the promotion's former franchise wrestler, Ric Flair, who would go out a loser nearly every night after selling most of the match, only served to destroy whatever credibility the championship had left.

The NWA's financial problems were pretty much well-known by January within wrestling, and even more evident in May when the balloon payments on the big contracts came due.

With the wrestlers owed money, with hard travel and small house show gates, Rhodes became the scapegoat in many wrestlers and fans' eyes. Much of the blame was deserved, since Rhodes continued to push himself in 1988 in several key angles, starting with the Larry Zbyszko/Baby Doll pictures angle, which was dropped when nobody cared. Rhodes blamed that one on Zbyszko, who was buried for the rest of the year, and Baby Doll, who was dropped from the circuit. Then came the "hot" angle where Rhodes, saving Magnum T.A. after he was decked by Tully Blanchard, came to his rescue with a baseball bat, accidentally hit Jim Crockett, and was suspended, leading up to the Midnight Rider, the masked version of Rhodes that had been originally planned for late 1987 but was postponed.

But nobody cared about the Midnight Rider, either, which led to tension among the wrestlers until the gimmick was abruptly dropped. At this point, confidence in Rhodes as a booker was at an all-time low, and questions about the future of the promotion were being asked.

After the Great American Bash was over, in a power-play attempt, the NWA's three key heels, Ric Flair, Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson all more or less resigned and for a week things were shaky as to their future. However Crockett didn't take the threat seriously, stayed with Rhodes, and all three came back.

However the issue wasn't as settled as the company had imagined. The key losses of Anderson & Blanchard came one month later, mainly because Blanchard's complaints about Rhodes to Jack Petrik, who was going to take over the control of the company upon the TBS purchase, got back to Rhodes and feelings were hurt when Blanchard was no longer a fixture in the main eventer private jet. This led to Blanchard & Anderson's quitting, and subsequent joining up with Titan.

With Crockett staying with Rhodes as booker all the way to the bitter end, despite the clearly obvious problems not getting straightened out, the big question became what would happen when Turner Entertainment took over the NWA, which by the summer, was an inevitability.

Negotiations dragged on and while the rumor mill ran rampant as to Rhodes' successor, there was a disagreement at the TBS level as to his future. However, the key player in the future company, Jack Petrik, reportedly was behind Rhodes.

At about that point, Flair made his move. On a Mid South tour in late October, Flair suddenly balked at doing Rhodes' directed match (Flair sells the entire match, gets pinned cleanly, but the decision is reversed because of the ref bump and another ref seeing Flair throwing his foe over the top for the DQ) and Dusty finish with Lex Luger. Title matches in several cities had to be changed to tag team matches because Flair and Rhodes didn't work together in coming up with a compromise finish.

At this point, the heat was on both Flair and Rhodes. Rhodes painted Flair as a prima-donna while Flair felt that Rhodes' booking had destroyed both Flair's personal credibility as a World champion, but also the value of the title belt itself.

Flair's threats regarding his future with the promotion were taken seriously enough by TBS, that he was rewarded with a lucrative new contract which also gave him unprecedented power for a World champion regarding his title reign and his finishes.

Rhodes saw that as a threat, and basically heads collided. Whether Rhodes' December bookings, which left Flair off most of the major shows, were an attempt to get him to quit the promotion and join the WWF, has been widely speculated. However Rhodes' planned Starcade main event, in which Flair was to drop the NWA strap to Rick Steiner in short order, led to even more heat when Flair walked out of the November 14 meeting when the word was given to him.

Major panic set in on November 15, with Flair's future with the company once again in doubt. This time, in order to save Flair, TBS overruled Rhodes, and Flair and TBS agreed on a new Starcade main event, with Flair going against Lex Luger and with Flair being promised a clean pinfall victory in the middle of the ring (which, as it turned out, didn't quite occur).

After being overruled, Rhodes suddenly took ill and missed a key weekend of main event dates. The TBS brass was furious, and this was really the beginning of the downfall of Rhodes.

But while disagreement continued over whether Rhodes should be replaced as booker, the order to fire Rhodes was never given. The straw that broke the camel's back came just days later, however, when, just days after a specific TBS directive to NWA headquarters about not having any graphic blood on television, Rhodes shot an angle where the Road Warriors spiked him in the eye and he bled heavily.

If defying the order wasn't bad enough, Rhodes wasn't helped when more than 350 callers phoned in to TBS during and after the show to complain about the graphic nature of the event. It was the largest negative outpouring of emotion to the company regarding wrestling since Black Saturday, when Titan Sports took over the NWA's time slot in 1984.

The official word on the following Wednesday was that Rhodes had resigned as booker and Jim

Crockett was taking over, which is how things stand as the year comes to a close.

9. UWF DRAWS \$500,000 GATE AT ARIAKE COLISEUM

If the early success of the Universal Wrestling Federation was simply a flash-in-the-pan since the group had booked nothing but small venues, that theory went out the window in late June.

The newest major federation in the world set a standard for the quickest and largest sellout of a major show in the history of pro wrestling.

Officially, all 12,000 tickets for the August 13 card at Ariake, an outdoor stadium in the Tokyo Bay Area, best known for being a Japanese version of Candlestick Park because of its location near the water, cold night-time temperatures and heavy winds and also being the mecca for major tennis tournaments in Japan, sold out in six hours. Reportedly, approximately 10,000 more fans were turned away the first day alone.

The success of this show stunned the wrestling world. The \$500,000 live gate was the seventh largest in the history of pro wrestling up to then. More impressively, while the gate wasn't the all-time record, it blew away every existing record for one-day sales to a wrestling event. In comparison, the hottest U.S. show in history, the Andre vs. Hogan match from Wrestlemania III in Pontiac, MI, sold approximately 20,000 tickets and \$400,000 in its first week of sales. The Ric Flair vs. Kerry Von Erich match at Texas Stadium had a \$150,000 advance about two weeks prior to the card. The fact this was accomplished without any television was even more stunning.

The card, which included several martial arts type matches including kick boxing, karate, shoot-boxing and Thai boxing (a form of kick boxing) was headlined by Akira Maeda in a mixed match against European karate ace Gerard Gordeau of Holland, who had very little name value in Japan except that he placed highly in a famous karate tournament. Maeda won the match in the fifth round via submission, while the top UWF style wrestling match on the show, a brutal battle saw Kazuo Yamazaki pin Nobuhiko Takada.

10. DUMP MATSUMOTO RETIRES

The exhibition/sport of women's wrestling reached its greatest heights in late 1985 in the country of Japan, and one of the key factors in that popularity was the World Women's Wrestling Association's top heel, Kuaro "Dump" Matsumoto.

Matsumoto actually pioneered the gimmick that the Road Warriors would later use to great fame in the United States, of being face-painted bikers with bizarre hair-cuts and monster heels who sold very little, if at all, for the smaller, under matched baby faces.

Many would say Matsumoto was the best heel in wrestling from 1985-87, and some would say she ranks right up there among the best heels, male or female, that the business has ever produced.

Certainly in terms of ability to draw an intense reaction from the crowd, and in an ability to scare a crowd, it would be hard to top her.

The key difference between Matsumoto as a heel, in comparison with the leading male monster heels of Japan, such as Abdullah the Butcher or Bruiser Brody, is that when the fans would get chased by Butcher or Brody, they ran away, but with smiles on their faces. When Matsumoto chased the fans, they ran in fear.

Matsumoto's impact was so great that she often brought crowds literally to tears with her villainous tactics, and when she would merely walk down the street in any major city, people would scatter in fear.

Japanese women's wrestling has some bizarre rituals, but perhaps the strangest is the rule that all wrestlers must retire upon reaching their 26 birthday. The rule does have practical advantages in that it forces the promotion to constantly create new stars, thus situations that often occur in the U.S. and in Japan when over-the-hill wrestlers run promotions into the ground can't occur. It also works to the advantage of the promotion in that the sport never becomes identified with a personality too strongly, so no individual wrestler gets the type of power that stars in the other groups have obtained.

When Matsumoto turned 25, the rule was waived. There was no successor in sight for the role of lead heel, and Dump's trademark of using the kendo stick and the oil can to wreak havoc upon Chigusa Nagayo couldn't be duplicated by anyone else.

But two years later, Matsumoto had decided to call it a career. Her retirement on February 25 in Kawasaki, which was also retirement night for another leading Japanese female wrestling star, Yukari Omori, saw Dump get the crowd on her side for a change in a battle against The Crush Gals. With a sellout live crowd plus the largest television audience to watch wrestling in Japan for any promotion of 1988 (the event drew a 13.3 rating, phenomenal for Saturday afternoons and a week earlier the Fuji-television network even ran a 30 minute special chronicling her career), Matsumoto's oil can was finally sent into the sunset.

Matsumoto and Omori battled to a time limit draw against The Crush Gals, and when the match was over, Dump's long-time rival, Chigusa Nagayo grabbed the house mike and pled for Dump to team with her just once. What followed was a five minute exhibition in which the two big rivals, Chigusa and Dump, teamed together for the first and only time against Omori and Lioness Asuka.

It wasn't until Matsumoto's retirement that one really could appreciate her impact upon the business. Television ratings plummeted over the rest of the year. While Chigusa Nagayo remained very popular, her drawing power was way down without her heel rival to play to. Women's wrestling lost much of its appeal to the general public, in which it was almost a closet television obsession in many circles.

For example, during the heyday of Japanese women's wrestling, while the live show crowds

consisted mainly of teenage girls, the television ratings themselves indicated a much broader-based audience, but one which apparently never attended the live shows.

Matsumoto retired having drawn two of the three largest houses in the history of women's wrestling, a \$220,000 house in Osaka on August 28, 1985 when she defeated Chigusa Nagayo in a hair vs. hair match, followed by a \$174,000 house for their hair vs. hair rematch, which Dump lost, on November 7, 1986.

Matsumoto now reportedly makes a fortune as a game show guest on various television shows in Japan.

Some of the other stories which made news this past year included:

BATTLE OF JANUARY 24

The "Big Show Wars," which began on Thanksgiving of 1987, had its second round on January 24.

The NWA planned its first national pay-per-view event, the finals of the Bunkhouse Stampede from Titan's base area of New York City. To counter, Titan ran a free USA network special featuring what was billed as the first Royal Rumble Battle Royal (actually the first Royal Rumble had been held months earlier in St. Louis).

As far as which group put on the better show, you'd have to score a victory for Titan Sports, almost by default. The Royal Rumble drew a phenomenal 8.2 rating on the USA network (and a repeat showing the next week drew a healthy 4.5) and the Rumble itself, kind of a lottery drawing Battle Royal, was won by Jim Duggan in 36 minutes. Actually the performance of Bret Hart made the Rumble much better than anticipated. The live show itself drew approximately 15,000 fans at the Copps Coliseum in Hamilton, Ontario. The highlight match of the under card saw the Jumping Bomb Angels from Japan capture the WWF women's tag team titles from Leilani Kai & Judy Martin, The Glamour Ghouls in a 2 of 3 fall match, plus they had a skit where Dino Bravo attempted to bench press more than 700 pounds of helium weight.

The NWA's Bunkhouse did about a three percent buy rate, which actually is the best of the four pay-per-view shows the company has done to now.

The headline event from the Nassau Coliseum, which drew 6,000 fans and \$80,000, was an eight man free-for-all in a cage won by Dusty Rhodes for \$500,000 in monopoly money. Also on the show, Road Warrior Hawk beat Ric Flair via disqualification in a good match with an expected finish and Larry Zbyszko captured the now-forgotten Western States Heritage championship from Barry Windham.

Overall, in many ways, the Bunkhouse was the No. 1 fiasco of all the pay-per-view events of the year, not from a financial sense or even a sense of bad matches, but from the standpoint of satisfying the customers.

The one hour and 50 minute card was considered too short, as was the idea of a four-match show. Three of the advertised participants in the main event failed to show up, one due to an injury and two because

they had quit the promotion. In addition, the Rock & Roll Express vs. Shepherders match scheduled for the under card never took place because the Rock & Roll Express was fired prior to the show.

And to make matters worse, the show started at 6:30 p.m. Eastern, was advertised on television for a 7 p.m. start, and was over by 8:50 p.m. However many of the tickets had an 8 p.m. start listed.

RIOT AT SUMO HALL KEEPS NEW JAPAN FROM PROMOTING MAJOR TOKYO CARDS

While U.S. fans may have considered the NWA's Bunkhouse Stampede or the WWF's Wrestlemania as the fiasco of the year, the Japanese got the edge in the fiasco category as well.

While technically, the riot at the Sumo Hall took place on December 27, 1987, its effects were felt this past year because the Japanese Sumo Association banned New Japan from using its most prestigious arena, which prevented New Japan from drawing those megagates they had drawn in Japan's largest city in 1987.

The Antonio Inoki vs. Riki Choshu main event sold out the 11,000 seat facility and drew a \$400,000 house plus an 11 rating for the 90 minute prime-time special. It also marked the beginning (and the end) of New Japan's attempts to follow Titan's lead and use celebrities in wrestling angles in order to gain mainstream attention.

Back in September, Takeshi Kitano, at one time Japan's most famous comedian, with the name value equivalent to a Johnny Carson in this country, leaked out a story that he was going to start his own wrestling promotion. Actually this was a work, to create a promotion vs. promotion feud in the New Japan ranks, which had been so successful in the early part of the decade in popping crowds.

Kitano "enlisted" Masa Saito and was going to form an Army of foreign heels, in particular The Pirates and Big Van Vader, who along with Saito would destroy Inoki.

Vader and Kitano were to debut on December 27, and before the main events on the show were to start, Saito and Takeshi came out and issued a challenge to Inoki on that night. The fans were furious when Inoki accepted, because it was Inoki vs. Choshu that they had come to see. When Choshu replaced Vader (Leon White) as Saito's tag team partner against Tatsumi Fujinami & Kengo Kimura in a semifinal match, the place went crazy. Fans chanted "Stop the match, stop the match" and threw chairs, tables, eggs and anything else they could get their hands on, making the ring look like the Spectrum used to look in 1984 when the Iron Sheik was a hot heel.

To quell the riot, Inoki said he'd wrestle Choshu, but the six minute match was so uneventful that tensions got even higher. Then, when Vader pinned Inoki in just two minutes in the main event, the place went crazy. It took the riot squad nearly one hour to stop the vandalizing to the building, including several fires that were set.

The Sumo Association then announced a ban on New Japan using the building, which originally was to last for six months. Kitano, appalled by the scene, turned his back on pro wrestling. The Sumo Association lengthened the ban during the summer, when New Japan announced an August 8 date at Sumo Hall without having all the details worked out, and the Sumo Association pulled the building from them again. It won't be until February 22, 1989 when New Japan will be able to return to the building it had so much success in during 1987.

WWF SIGNS BIG BUBBA ROGERS, TURNS HIM INTO BIG BOSSMAN

One of the NWA's leading gimmick performers of 1987 was the 6-foot-5, 350-pound bodyguard named "Big Bubba" Rogers.

First, as bodyguard for Jim Cornette, Bubba, then a totally green worker, shocked everyone including those in the promotion when he drew some huge houses for his feud against Dusty Rhodes. Later, after Bubba lost to most every face all the way down the line, as part of the plan to show the NWA's superiority over the UWF, Bubba, by then relegated to a mid-level NWA performer, immediately won the UWF championship from One Man Gang, a move which eventually led to Ted DiBiase, who had been promised the strap before the Crockett buy-out, quitting and joining Titan.

Bubba eventually returned to Cornette, but was used more as a bodyguard than a wrestler. But the size and gimmick were enough for Titan Sports to salivate, and in January, Bubba was signed.

There were problems here, however. Bubba had an NWA contract which didn't expire until May, and the NWA claimed that they had trademarked the character.

Bubba had to get some odd jobs during the spring, then managed a tour of Japan before his NWA contract expired, and was free to join Titan.

As the new character of The Big Bossman, the evil prison guard, he turned into one of the hottest heels of the year. His feud with Hogan, starting from his attacking Hogan with a nightstick at a television taping, was the top money feud of the year.

The most ironic part about the Big Bossman gimmick is that up until 1986, even when the former Ray Traylor had already started working as "Big Bubba," his job in real life was that of a prison guard, at the Cobb County Correctional Institution. For once, a gimmick was real.

STING & LEX LUGER WIN THIRD ANNUAL CROCKETT CUP

One of the leading major events of the NWA season over the past two years had been the Jim Crockett Sr. Memorial tag team tournament.

This year's event was the first held in separate cities, with the semifinals taking place on April 22 in Greenville, S.C. and the finals the next night at the Greensboro Coliseum.

The event once again was hardly the financial success the NWA had been hoping for. The first

night in Greenville, which contained pairings that nobody to this day has ever figured out, drew 4,400 fans and \$53,000 while the finals drew 6,300 and \$115,000 in Greensboro.

As a live show, the first night was a night of horrors in many ways, although a few of the matches weren't bad. Luckily the event didn't air on pay-per-view or the Kevin Sullivan vs. Jim Garvin Prince of Darkness Death match would have been a major contender for Worst Match of the Century.

The second night was an excellent show in all regards, except that of attendance. Lex Luger & Sting, who originally weren't scheduled as a team in the tournament, captured the fray beating Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson in the finals for \$1,000,000 of JCP balloon payment money.

BILLY JACK HAYNES OPENS AND CLOSES OWF

At about the same time as Akira Maeda was getting the UWF formed in Japan, Billy Jack Haynes had his own ideas about promoting.

Recently dropped by the WWF for health reasons, Haynes began his own promotion in Oregon in competition with Don Owen. Haynes figured the WWF's bigger-is-better philosophy and modern promotional tactics would destroy Owen.

The opposite resulted. Haynes' group never got off the ground. Fingers were pointed in many directions. First off, the group had a hard time getting enough dates for a full-time schedule, and even when they did run, crowds were sparse. Second, Haynes promised guarantees of \$600 to \$800 per week. Third, Haynes' crew mainly consisted of green workers who weren't experienced enough nor had enough name value to turn the fans away from the existing group. The whole exercise lasted less than three months, and Haynes hasn't been heard from since.

FNN CARRIES CWA AND CWF WRESTLING

The newest cable system to get involved in the ever-expanding amount of wrestling on television was the Financial News Network/Score network.

Actually, FNN had carried Polynesian Wrestling on occasion, but during the early part of this year planned to get into the wrestling business in a big way, by carrying several promotions and hoping to put together a pay-per-view event.

FNN's involvement began with the CWA wrestling show, and during the early stages, aired a main event "match of the week," generally the hot match of the Memphis arena show from the week or two previous. The network also ran a few Jerry Lawler specials, showing some of Lawler's most famous matches of the past.

Later FNN expanded to carrying CWF, and at one point negotiations even started to carry the New Japan Pro Wrestling show.

As the year came to a close, the FNN wrestling shows never caught fire. The primary problem

was frequent preemptions and erratic scheduling. Viewers never knew if or when the shows would air.

As the year came to a close, with FNN/Score once again going through a reorganization in its sports programming, wrestling is on another temporary hiatus. While there is a scheduled return and an involvement in wrestling planned for 1989, they have a lot of winning back of fans ahead of them.

BRUNO SAMMARTINO QUILTS TITAN SPORTS AND CRITICIZES THE GROUP

For more than two decades, the World Wrestling Federation and Bruno Sammartino have been almost synonymous.

Sammartino was the WWF's champion from May of 1963 through January of 1971, and came back for a second run from December of 1973 through the spring of 1977. After his retirement in 1981, Sammartino and Titan Sports were at odds and Sammartino even sued his former promoter, Vince McMahon, Sr.

In late 1984, when McMahon's son was at the helm of Titan, and the lawsuit was scheduled to go to trial, Jr. settled the case out-of-court and as part of the deal, Bruno returned for a highly-paid job as McMahon's color commentator on television and his son David got a wrestling job with Titan. Most feel that timing came in order to keep Sammartino from lending his name to the fledgling Pro Wrestling USA promotion, which combined several of the leading groups, and was scheduled to promote in the major Northeast markets in competition with Titan.

Relations between the two sides were never great, and once Jesse Ventura came in and made it a three-man broadcast team, Bruno turned into the "silent partner." He mainly spoke only when spoken to. Wrestling had changed so much since his day on top that he genuinely hated the new version of the product and felt almost degraded by lending credence to it.

However, in order to help his son's career, he came out of retirement and drew some huge gates in the Northeast. At one point, he was almost working full-time, despite a painful back injury which was getting worse at the same time his schedule was getting more grueling in the ring.

Sammartino felt fed up with the direction his son's career was taking with Titan, fed up with the direction of the business, and at the same time, a former Titan employee set up a 900 number business with Sammartino. Sammartino felt it was the time to leave the WWF. Just a few days later, son David was fired over an incident where he allegedly shoved and kicked a fan in Watertown, New York.

His son getting fired, combined with Titan's attempts to keep Bruno from not only using his name (which was his real name) and his "Living Legend" nickname in advertisements for his phone service, and the state of the business itself led to Sammartino going on KDKA radio in Pittsburgh and later the Apter wrestling magazines and airing his gripes.

It turned into one of the most controversial issues of the summer. Few wrestlers had ever spoken out in such detail and with as much candor as to the direction the business was taking. And of those that had,

few had the status of Sammartino within the business.

Reaction was mixed to Sammartino's comments. While some felt he said things that needed to be said, and the vast majority of his points were well taken, others felt differently. Many were enraged by Sammartino's almost public acknowledgement that things were real in his day but insinuating they aren't today. The furor died down finally, but Sammartino still speaks his mind daily on the 900 number.

JERRY LAWLER CAPTURED AWA TITLE

Memphis played host on May 8 to the biggest card of the minor league circuits in North America this year which many have called the final hurrah for Jerry Lawler perhaps the leading regional star in the country.

Lawler, a Memphis fixture since 1971, gained regional attention almost upon the outset of his career, more for his heel interviews and arrogant mannerisms than for his actual wrestling. Probably his greatest feat came three years later when he and Jackie Fargo set a record with something like 13 consecutive weeks of sellouts in the 11,000 seat Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis.

From that point on, Lawler was known as "The King." He headlined virtually every show in Memphis and over a one-year period at one point, the promotion averaged 8,000 fans each Monday.

As times grew harder for the smaller offices in recent years, the popularity of Memphis wrestling and Lawler's drawing power dwindled down.

But for one night this spring, it was like the falling off never happened. For several weeks the CWA had been promoting the date, with Lawler vowing to retire if he couldn't capture the AWA title from Curt Hennig. The promotion even organized a 900 number where fans could vote for a referee, either Larry Hennig or Jackie Fargo.

The Saturday before the card, everyone from the City Council to the Mayor himself gave speeches on television wishing Lawler well. Lawler had been a Memphis institution for years, at one point he was the most popular athlete in the city and perhaps its most recognized personality.

In front of approximately 8,000 fans, Lawler finally did the one thing he never had done in Memphis, capture what was perceived by the fans as a World title.

Ironically, the original plan was for Lawler to hold the title for about seven weeks, and then drop the title back to Hennig. Eight months later, Lawler still has possession of the title, although as the New Year begins, it appears a split has occurred between the AWA and the CWA and that Lawler, who later captured what is billed as the unified World title at Superclash III from Kerry Von Erich, will defend his title and the AWA will get a champion of its own.

SUPERCLASH III

The smaller offices, with the help of FNN/Score, had their own pay-per-view attempt this past year.

While originally all the small groups were to be involved, when everything settled, Verne Gagne's AWA joined forces with Jerry Jarrett Promotions (World Class and CWA) and David McLane's POWW to present Superclash III at the UIC Pavilion in Chicago on December 13.

The results?

Financially, a bomb. The show reportedly drew somewhere between 28,000 and 41,000 homes on national pay-per-view, or between 0.5 and 0.7 percent buy rate (they need about a one percent buy rate for the event to be a financial success). The live card in Chicago drew just 1,672 paid and \$25,081.

Aesthetically, it was a mixed bag. The main event between Jerry Lawler and Kerry Von Erich to unify the AWA and World Class titles was of excellent quality, although many fans were rightly upset that the promise of a clean victory wasn't delivered as Lawler won the match when the referee stopped it on blood. It was the same finish the NWA had for its Baltimore Bash just a few months earlier on pay-per-view.

A few of the other matches were good, some were average, and some, like the POWW tear-your-clothes-off Battle Royal, in which almost no clothes were torn off, were downright embarrassing to even the low standards of pro wrestling.

The aftermath. Once again a disaster. Jarrett and Gagne split up after the receipts came in, and the brief dream of the small promotions working together ended almost as quickly as it began.

BARRY WINDHAM TURNS HEEL

This was the year of the turn. So many major stars went for baby face to heel, or vice versa, that you'd need an Encyclopedia to keep up with it.

Part of the reason for all this is the desperation of most of the promotions to draw, and because the public had been overloaded with angles, most turns had virtually no effect at the gate.

Probably the biggest turn of 1988 occurred in late April, when almost without any warning, Barry Windham turned on Lex Luger in a tag match in Tallahassee, and became a member of the Four Horseman.

While the NWA was failing in too many other ways for this angle to actually draw big money, most consider that it was a major success. Windham had long been respected as one of the best workers around, but the heel turn seemed to invigorate his career, give him a tremendous arrogant personality, and his ring-work, if anything, improved to the point that many consider him the best worker in the business right now.

JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT TOURNAMENT PRODUCES BEST MATCHES

Probably the best actual wrestling in 1988 occurred in January, when New Japan Pro Wrestling organized a tournament with the best junior heavyweights around.

This was the first month-long round-robin tournament New Japan, or for that matter, any promotion had organized with junior heavyweights since early in 1984, and the timing was just about right.

In 1984, New Japan brought together the best junior heavyweights found anywhere, from Canada came Dynamite Kid, Davey Boy Smith and Bret Hart, from England came Black Tiger (Mark "Rollerball" Rocco), Baby Face came in from Mexico, while Japan had a crew which included The Cobra (George Takano), Kuniaki Kobayashi and a newcomer who was destined for stardom in Nobuhiko Takada. Dynamite Kid won the tournament, and recognition as WWF junior heavyweight champion.

Four years later the junior heavyweight division looked even stronger. New Japan became overloaded with excellent talent, with Takada now a full-fledged superstar, former Olympian Hiroshi Hase making a big name and holding the IWGP World jr. title, Keiichi Yamada came into his own as one of the best workers in the world, Kazuo Yamazaki, Shiro Koshinaka, Hiro Saito and Kobayashi were all well-respected workers, plus, appearing in the role Takada had four years earlier, was 18-year-old Masaharu Funaki, expected five years down the road to be Japan's future Fujinami. With all that talent, just two foreigners joined in, Owen Hart, who in just one tour of Japan had already established himself as one of the most popular foreign wrestlers came from Canada, and Tony St. Clair from England.

The matches didn't disappoint anyone. Everyone did jobs during the tournament. There were upsets (like Hase losing to Yamazaki, Hart to Yamada and Takada to Yamazaki). There were great matches (particularly noteworthy were two matches on February 4 in Osaka with Takada vs. Koshinaka and Yamada vs. Hase) and finally, in the upset finish, Koshinaka won the tournament pinning Hase.

Ironically, the timing of this tournament was just about perfect. Just a few months later, the junior heavyweight division was in disarray. Takada and Yamazaki left for the UWF. Hart joined Titan Sports, thus was unable to return to Japan, Hase suffered a series of serious injuries and Funaki went to Europe.

MIDNIGHT RIDER ANGLE FLOPS

In Dusty Rhodes' never-ending quest to get himself over like he was in the 1970s, he brought back one of his favorite angles. Dusty gets suspended unjustly, and defies the system and returns as the Midnight Rider.

This time, Tully Blanchard knocked down Magnum T.A. during a TBS interview, which so enraged Dusty that he beat Blanchard to death with a baseball bat (Blanchard getting out without a scratch is a miracle of either modern medicine or Dusty's ability to work with lumber) and in his rage, accidentally knocked Jim Crockett down with the bat as well.

The hideous NWA Board of Governors, amidst the protests from baby face promoter Paul Boesch of Houston, suspended Dusty for 90 days. Enter

the Midnight Rider. But nobody cared. After a few shows with the Midnight Rider on top drew no heat nor fans, the idea was scrapped just two weeks later.

CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS

Jim Crockett Promotions and Turner Broadcasting got together this year to produce quarterly specials, entitled Clash of the Champions, to showcase the NWA talent.

The first Clash, held in Greensboro opposite Wrestlemania IV, was an over-whelming success, drawing a 5.8 rating, headlined by Ric Flair vs. Sting in what was voted Match of the Year by the Observer readers. Clash II: Miami Mayhem, was a mixed blessing, drawing a 4.8 rating with Dusty Rhodes & Sting beat Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson via DQ on top. Clash III: The Fall Brawl, drew a 5.4 with Sting beating Barry Windham via DQ on top with John Ayres doing a run-in, was also a so-so show. Clash IV: Seasons Beatings from Chattanooga looked on paper to be a winner, and TBS was pleased with the 4.5 rating it delivered, but production problems and horrible matches in the middle of the show made it the least pleasing in most eyes, despite an excellent main event with Flair & Windham beating the Midnight Express.

Overall, the idea of quarterly prime-time specials has been deemed a ratings success, and it should continue throughout 1989.

SUMMER SLAM

The WWF's second pay-per-view outing of 1988 was Summer Slam, on August 29 from Madison Square Garden.

While the show did well in the books, with a sellout of nearly 20,000 in Madison Square Garden and a gate in excess of \$300,000; plus a healthy 4.5 percent buy rate, the line-up advertised was weak and the reality of the show was weak as well.

The hype was based around Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage teaming up for the first time against Andre the Giant & Ted DiBiase with Jesse Ventura as referee, with the promise that Elizabeth would shed her clothes for the adoring public. Liz half-kept her promise, ripping off the skirt just as it seemed the baby faces were finished. Then came the comeback, and the heels, and DiBiase's drawing power, were finished.

TITAN GETS INTO BOXING BUSINESS

November 7 saw Titan run a pay-per-view event without using any wrestlers. It was fight time, and they signed fading legend Sugar Ray Leonard against a Canadian set-up named Donny Lalonde, and paid \$9.5 million for the pay-per-view rights.

From the beginning, everyone in boxing claimed Titan had overspent for the fight. Newspapers were labeling the impending fight as perhaps one of the biggest financial bloodbaths in the sport's recent history. Titan remained calm on the exterior, saying they'd break every pay-per-view record in the book.

Despite Titan's best efforts as hype, and the hype was very good, the public didn't respond as expected. The national buy rate of 3.4 percent was lower than any of Titan's wrestling shows had drawn on

pay-per-view in several years, and none of the wrestling shows had a \$9.5 price tag for rights. The best estimate is Titan lost in the range of \$4.7 million on the venture.

While it was an expensive lesson in sports promotion, Titan came out undaunted. Titan claimed publicly they did a 6.8 percent buy rate and set an all-time record for pay-per-view gross gate, beating the record they had set earlier in the year for Wrestlemania, so they claimed (and suddenly lowering the Wrestlemania reported gross down several million from their original reports after the show as well). This was of course also pretending that Mike Tyson and Michael Spinks had never fought, and never drawn their 15 percent buy rate earlier in the year. No matter, while the media gobbled it up in the beginning, many newspapers started questioning the story and realistic figures came out weeks later.

An expensive lesson, yes. But a lesson, indeed. Titan is committed to more boxing in 1989, and hopes to bid on Leonard's big money fight with Marvin Hagler, if the two sides can be brought together during the summer. They won't have to lie about the figures in that one.

POWERS OF PAIN JOIN WWF

One of the strangest hot and not stories of 1989 involved the Powers of Pain, two gigantic muscle heads known as The Warlord & The Barbarian.

The two started the year feuding with the Road Warriors, and even with a hot angle to start things off, the feud died at the box office and most of the matches weren't so hot as well. By the Clash of Champions show in March, when the two teams were put in a six-man barbed wire match and nobody cared, the feud was over. Or should have been. But they kept at it, destroying the once-great drawing power of the Warriors by feuding them with a team nobody cared about with a manager who was labeled by those who knew the situation best as "Death to a heel."

So to further a bad situation, scaffold matches were set up between the two teams for July. The Powers had about enough at this point, and bolted to the WWF, rather than risk their knees taking big plunges off scaffolds, especially when one considers the force on the joints of a 340 pound man falling several feet down.

The Powers showed up as baby faces, to everyone's surprise, and feuded with Demolition. It was an amazing response. Titan dressed the Powers up exactly like the Road Warriors, and told them to copy the Warriors every move. The crowds popped for them like they were the Road Warriors, and inexplicably, in many arenas, fans thought they actually were the Road Warriors. Titan was overjoyed. They had finally acquired the Road Warriors, and for probably one-fifth the price it would have cost to get the Real McCoys.

But the honeymoon ended fast. After one or two appearances around the horn and a feud with the Bolsheviks, the Powers of Pain were a dead act. Just as fast as they burst upon the scene, they blended into the scenery and nobody cared. In November, after a double turn, Titan tried to spice

up the Demolition vs. Powers of Pain feud. In 1989, we'll see where the Powers wind up.

BALTIMORE BASH

Turner Broadcasting got into the wrestling business as partners with Jim Crockett on a July 10th pay-per-view extravaganza from Baltimore.

The five-match Baltimore Bash, headlined by the long-awaited Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger confrontation for the NWA title, drew a sellout of 14,000 fans and \$208,000 to the Baltimore Arena, and drew a 2.2 percent buy rate on pay-per-view.

The show itself got mixed reviews. The match quality was acceptable all around, although many didn't like the Tower of Doom. Some of the matches were quite good. But the finish of the Flair-Luger match left a bad taste in people's mouth that were expecting pay-per-view to give them winners and losers. Flair maintaining the title because Luger was bloody, while Flair was caught in Luger's Torture Rack, was a disappointing finish to many since Luger didn't bleed enough to make the finish work.

Ironically, the subsequent first rematches of Flair vs. Luger in most cities drew some of the NWA's best gates of the year.

DEATHS

While the deaths of Bruiser Brody and Adrian Adonis made the headlines, several others passed away during 1988.

Most notable of these included Leroy McGuirk, a wrestling superstar of the 1940s whose 11-year reign as World junior heavyweight champion may have been the longest title reign of a major World champion in the history of the business. McGuirk, whose wrestling career ended in 1951 after injuries in an auto accident resulted in blindness, still remained in the business as the promoter in the Ozark territory (which later became Bill Watts' Mid South Wrestling area) through 1981. Promoter McGuirk was responsible for many of pro wrestling's biggest names, including Cowboy Bill Watts, Danny Hodge and Brody getting their ring starts.

Bad Leroy Brown, whose real name was Leroy Rochester, 38, died of a stroke after a two week illness at his home in Georgia. Because of his size, at 6-foot-5 and 320 pounds, Brown was a headliner in many of the smaller and mid-sized circuits throughout the 70s and through 1986, and in recent years formed a tag team called the Zambuie Express with Ray Candy.

Other notables who passed away included "Gentleman" Saul Weingeroff, a wrestler-manager-promoter, "Tiger" Joe Tommaso, who also worked as both a wrestler and manager, John Foley, another wrestler and manager and "Iron" Mike Clancy, a former junior heavyweight world champion.

BLOW-UP IN THE CWF

The Continental Wrestling Federation was this year's shooting star of wrestling promotions.

It started from ground zero, suddenly built up momentum, and then, in a blink, it was all over.

The reasons for its brief success and subsequent failure coincide with the hiring of Eddie Gilbert as booker, and his subsequent departure.

Gilbert put together a combination of Memphis and Mid South promotion styles with basically a group of mid-level talent with the exception of Austin Idol and manager Paul E. Dangerously, and had some success in at one point, tripling house show gates from their original levels.

After a few bad weeks, which some attributed more to seasonal drop-off because of the first few weeks of school, tension between Gilbert and the rest of the front office, particularly General Manager Ron West and Owner David Woods came to a head.

Gilbert wanted to expand faster than they wanted to, and wanted the territory, which started in Alabama, to extend from South Florida west to Arkansas and eventually Oklahoma.

Tensions got worse when Gilbert suffered a neck injury, which the promotion claimed wasn't nearly as bad as Gilbert's side claimed. Many other issues, ranging from the office being upset that Gilbert worked a show in Kansas City, to Gilbert being upset when they changed his payoff sheets, to the office being upset that Gilbert was using too many wrestlers, to arguments about what wrestlers were coming in, led to the final blow-up.

Since that point, with the exception of a big house in Knoxville on Thanksgiving and a fairly good-sized house for the Road to Birmingham tournament, the CWF's success sputtered to a halt.

ROAD WARRIORS TURN HEEL

In the NWA's never-ending quest to turn each and every act during 1988, another of the key turns involved the most popular tag team in the business, The Road Warriors.

Despite their popularity, the Warriors seemed to have needed the turn at the time. They had already exhausted every possible heel combination to go against, and the box office possibilities of a feud with Sting & Lex Luger looked good, if only Dusty Rhodes wouldn't get involved.

The Warriors turn took place on October 7 in Richmond, VA when they turned on Sting in a six-man tag match, ending with one of the best bumps of the year, when Sting did a 180 degree flip off a clothesline.

Later the Warriors spiked Dusty's eye in the angle which eventually ended Dusty's booking career.

The turn and subsequent win of the NWA tag team titles from the Midnight Express on October 29 in New Orleans, should have revitalized the team's drawing power.

The first go-around with Sting & Luger only drew average houses, and the second go-around did far less than that. As the New Year approaches, people are scratching their heads trying to figure out how a team that is so well-known and so popular have such a hard time being involved

with an angle that turns out to be effective at the gate.

OWEN HART JOINS WWF

Never has a wrestler shot to the top when it comes to pure working ability as quickly as Owen Hart.

In some ways, it shouldn't be that much of a surprise. Hart comes from a long line of athletes. His grandfather competed as an Olympic marathon runner. His father Stu was a long-time pro wrestler and later promoter in Calgary, who was responsible for many of today's biggest names getting started. Almost every one of his brothers dabbled in wrestling, and brother Bret was also one of the top hands around.

Hart started working out in a wrestling ring before he was a teenager, and it is said would occasionally don a hood and work spot shows on the road while still trying to keep his status as an amateur wrestler alive.

Eventually Hart was a high school champion, then finished second in the collegiate nationals in Canada at the University of Calgary, and he started full-time wrestling in the summer of 1986. As a rookie, he placed second to Bam Bam Bigelow as rookie of the year, and probably would have captured the award had he been based in the United States. By the end of his first full-year in the business, his name was scattered around several of the major newsletter awards, finishing No. 3 in the ratings, second in Most Outstanding Wrestler, second for Best Technical Wrestler and first for Best Flier.

Tailor-made for Japan, Hart made a bit hit there and by the summer of 1988, his status had grown to where he was the second most popular foreign star in the Orient and even the wrestling magazines were taking notice of this star whose U.S. appearances could be counted on one hand.

Titan Sports came calling, and in July, Hart started out with the WWF, wrestling some matches under his real name, some as the Blue Angel, and finally settled in as The Blue Blazer.

Everything many feared would happen upon his WWF venture did take place. His sensational acrobatics were ground almost to a halt. His great nightly matches were a thing of the past. His size worked against him, and many other factors didn't help, either.

As 1989 approaches, the wrestler that so many felt would be the top worker in the business in the new decade seems headed for a long ride going nowhere.

BRITISH BULLDOGS LEAVE WWF

Four years ago, two wrestlers were talked about in almost the same manner Owen Hart was talked about six months ago.

Dynamite Kid is considered by many to be pound-for-pound the best worker of this decade. While severe injuries suffered late in 1986 put an end to the old Dynamite Kid, he rebounded somewhat this year and made a solid comeback.

Partner Davey Boy Smith fell victim to the bigger-is-better philosophy at Titan, and the former junior

heavyweight star bulked up to nearly 260 pounds on a 5-foot-10 frame that was made to carry probably 50 pounds less.

But the two were among the few wrestlers to actually leave Titan in 1988, to head back to Calgary, where they started their North American careers when both were teenagers, and to Japan, where they became international superstars many years ago.

Apparently the two were already contemplating the move, and may have done so no matter what happened, but a pair of backstage fracas between Dynamite Kid and the Rougeau brothers may have been the key point.

BAM BAM BIGELOW DEPARTS TITAN

Just over one year ago, Titan brought in Bam Bam Bigelow, gave him a megapush, and expected the gimmick of the agile 400 pounder with tatoos on his head to alleviate some of the pressure on Hulk Hogan as far as drawing houses.

The Bigelow experiment was a failure, in that Bigelow never got over to the extent Titan hoped for. Many reasons have been given, ranging from: 1) He never should have been a baby face to start with, he was a heel perfectly suited for Titan; 2) Oliver Humperdink doesn't cut it as a baby face manager; 3) He was booked against foes like King Kong Bundy and One Man Gang that were much larger than he was, so instead of being an agile monster, he was an agile plump baby face.

Finally, Bigelow became one of the few wrestlers making good money with Titan to actually quit the promotion, mainly to work Japan. By the end of the year, Bigelow was brought to the NWA, ironically using the same gimmick which failed with Titan, but it appears the main focus of his attention in 1989 will be Japan.

BLANCHARD & ANDERSON QUIT NWA

The biggest jumpers, as far as impact on wrestling were concerned, were when Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson, half of the Four Horseman, picked up their saddles and left for Titan.

Blanchard & Anderson had held the NWA's tag team title for most of 1988, and their departure made even casual fans wonder about the future of the NWA. While the departure was actually due more to conflicts with booker Dusty Rhodes than over money itself, it depleted the NWA of two solid heels who nightly gave fans their money's worth.

LARS ANDERSON AND LIA MAIVIA ARRESTED FOR EXTORTION

While 1988 appeared to have been a record year for criminal charges being brought against wrestlers, with the major event being the Brody murder, another big one saw Lars Anderson and Lia Maivia of Polynesian Pro Wrestling arrested for allegedly trying to extort money from John Wakayama, who attempted to promote a card in Honolulu.

The criminal complaint noted that Maivia, who heads up the promotion, Anderson, the booker, and Ati So'o, another key member of the front office, confronted Wakayama several times and made threats against Wakayama and his children if he didn't pay them a \$5,000 "tribute" fee for infringing upon their territory.

The trial is scheduled for early this coming year.

ALL JAPAN SETS GATE RECORD WITH BRODY MEMORIAL

Giant Baba's All Japan Pro Wrestling Company, which has been in existence for nearly two decades, set its all-time gate record on August 29 for the Bruiser Brody Memorial card at Tokyo's Budokan Hall.

The attendance, announced at 14,200, would have meant a gate near \$700,000 with tickets ranging from \$25 to \$80. Barbara and Geoffrey Goodish, the widow of Brody and his son, were flown in for the card, which originally was to be headlined by Brody's first-ever match against long-time partner Stan Hansen

INOKI SIGNS RUSSIAN OLYMPIC WRESTLERS

The first athletes from the Soviet Union to turn professional in any sport will be in of all things, the modern style of pro wrestling.

Credit desperation brought upon by the success of the UWF and the decline in television ratings for the sudden and expensive move by New Japan. Credit financial problems within the Soviet Union for having several gold medal winning Olympic athletes join up with the wrestling circus, Japanese style.

In what will certainly be among the most intriguing stories of 1989, the Soviet "shooters" will battle against both American and Japanese foes during the new year.

ASHURA HARA FIRED

Veteran wrestler and former rugby star Ashura Hara, 41, was fired by All Japan Pro Wrestling just days before the start of the tag team tournament that he and Genichiro Tenryu were co-favorites in.

The Tenryu & Hara tag team, billed as "The Revolution," had carried the heel side of All Japan for the past year-and-a-half, prompted by the jump of Riki Choshu to New Japan in 1987.

This past year was Hara's most successful, holding the tag team title on several occasions and gaining a bully reputation for his stiff clotheslines on less experienced foes.

The death of Hara's wrestling career came from outside forces, reportedly his gambling habit which he couldn't control. Several times Hara would get deeply into debt, and members of the Yakuza (Japanese mafia) would show up at All Japan cards wanting to have the debt paid. On at least one occasion, Giant Baba paid off Hara's debt with the promise Hara would clean up his act.

When this didn't happen, and Hara started missing dates to avoid having to confront his creditors, Baba

announced at a major news conference the end of Hara's pro wrestling career.

DOES HE OR DOESN'T HE?

One of the leading stories of the winter months involved Kerry Von Erich, the 28-year-old hapless heartthrob of World Class Wrestling.

Von Erich surprised doctors, who had predicted his wrestling career was finished after major injuries, particularly to one of his feet, suffered in a motorcycle accident in 1986. Von Erich returned late in 1987, and while lacking greatly in mobility, managed to make up for it with charisma and timing and was better in the ring than several in the business.

On November 12 in Las Vegas the big story started. While Von Erich was wrestling Col. DeBeers, DeBeers accidentally pulled Kerry's wrestling boot off, to reveal that Kerry was missing much of one of his feet.

The incident was one of the most controversial of the year. Almost immediately upon the word breaking of the incident, wrestling officials from both the AWA, CWA and World Class denied such an incident had taken place.

When Von Erich returned from Japan after a week of controversy, he claimed the boot that came off was of "his good foot." Others claimed no such incident ever took place.

Ironically, Rob Russen, who was the most vehement in these denials, was seated just a few seats down from several Observer readers, who did get photographic proof of the incident taking place which officials have denied ever happened.

AWA officials charged that newsletter editors, particularly myself and Wrestling Forum's Jon Gallagher, had made up the story and had other disparaging remarks about the newsletters in general. Others in wrestling, and even other newsletters, backed up their claim, while the majority of the wrestling press decided the best thing to do was pretend it never happened.

The WWF, on the other hand, saw the incident as a way to put a monkey wrench into the Superclash III card in Chicago, as they contacted the Illinois State Athletic Commission and tried to get Von Erich's wrestling license removed because the commission has a statute from the 1920s stating that any boxer or wrestler cannot be licensed without a limb. Eventually the commission held a hearing, while Von Erich was in Japan so Von Erich was never made to take off his boot, and produce the foot that so many claimed he actually had.

The commission ruled, four days before Superclash, that Von Erich could wrestle, claiming that since wrestling is an exhibition of holds and not a true sport, the statute wasn't necessarily valid. Even so, they noted that a boxer, with an amputated leg had been approved to fight in Illinois previously.

OREGON COMMISSION SHUTS DOWN DON OWEN

Troubles between the Oregon State Athletic Commission and Don Owen Promotions, a family wrestling business which goes back some 60-plus years, came to a head just before Thanksgiving.

It all started on November 12, when Matt Borne was doing an interview promoting a show the following Saturday and guaranteed that there would be blood, which the commission had decreed a no-no, and went so far as to almost dare the commission to do something about it.

The following Saturday came, and during Borne's match with Steve Doll, Borne was posted, blood came out, and the referee stopped the match. The commission then claimed that a security guard found the blade Borne used and confiscated it, and an emergency hearing was scheduled on Tuesday.

Shockingly, at the hearing, Owen's license to promote was suspended, partially for the blading incident and partially because Owen hadn't complied with the commission's order to have sturdier barricades separating the fans from the ringside area.

Several days of news press in the Portland area, including some front page stories, exposing the secrets of blading and the business, were the only wrestling action in the state.

Nine days later the sides came to a compromise. Owen promised no more blood and got the barricades the commission requested. And the Saturday night tradition of wrestling at the Portland Sports Arena only missed one week.

SURVIVORS SERIES

After two poor shows on pay-per-view, Titan rebounded with one of the best pay-per-view events in the short history of the industry in Survivors Series II from the Richfield Coliseum.

While the live event on Thanksgiving night drew 13,500, far from a sellout, and the pay-per-view buy rate was just 2.8, the lowest ever for a Titan show, as an overall wrestling production, it was one of the company's best efforts.

It was one of those nights where most everything clicked, from the work rate, to the technical aspects to the announcing. It was probably the best booked major show in a long time. The match involving the tag teams, considered the best on the show, saw a double turn of both Demolition and Powers of Pain. Turns of both Randy Savage and Terry Taylor were hinted at as well, as was the burial of The Blue Blazer.

Hulk Hogan & Savage were two co-survivors of the main match, outlasting a heel team which included Big Bossman, Akeem, Ted DiBiase, Haku and Red Rooster (Taylor).

STARCADE

The NWA's annual premier event lived up to its billing on December 26 at the Norfolk Scope.

The sixth annual Starcade show lived up to the wrestling standard set by outstanding Thanksgiving events in 1983, 1985 and 1986.

Overall, the show drew a \$150,000 live gate with 10,000 fans in attendance, shy of a sellout but not by much, and did about a 1.8 percent buy rate on pay-per-view.

Despite audio and technical problems, the show seemed to satisfy most viewers, with good-to-excellent matches and solid finishes.

Highlighting the card saw Ric Flair defend the NWA title pinning Lex Luger in 30:59 in a great performance by both wrestlers, particularly Luger had the best big-match of his career. Another match many felt was the best on the show was Barry Windham's count-out victory over Bam Bam Bigelow. In other matches, Dusty Rhodes & Sting beat The Road Warriors via DQ, Rick Steiner captured the television title from Mike Rotunda, Jim Cornette's Midnight Express of Stan Lane & Bobby Eaton downed Paul E. Dangerously's Midnight Express of Dennis Condrey & Randy Rose, and Steve Williams & Kevin Sullivan took the U.S. tag team titles from The Fantastics.

TAG TEAM TOURNAMENTS

Traditionally, the biggest event on the Japanese wrestling calendar each year is the December tag team tournament.

Both All Japan and New Japan promotions have been holding tournaments, featuring some of the top foreign and native duos, for more than a decade.

While both promotions held tournaments once again this year, each group had its weakest field in history which led to the lowest level of interest since either group started the gimmick up.

The All Japan tournament was hurt by a lack of quality foreign squads, with only Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy given any kind of a chance at winning. On the native side, one of the favorite teams, that of Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara, was broken up just days before the tournament was to begin due to Hara getting fired because of gambling debts. This left Hansen & Gordy's only apparent competition as the duo of Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu.

New Japan, after a disappointing tournament in 1987, dragged down by the loss of both Akira Maeda and Riki Choshu early in the tournament due to the shoot-kick, decided to try something different. This year, instead of having a traditional round-robin tournament, they held a round-robin six-man elimination tag team tournament with eliminations occurring either by pinfall, submission, or by a man being knocked out of the ring. Because the native teams matched up normal rivals, such as Antonio Inoki and Riki Choshu on the same team, the "heat" of the normal tournament was never there, nor did the gimmick ever really get over. The final night, December 7 in Osaka, drew just 5,740 fans in a 7,000 seat arena as Inoki proved his ego was still alive and kicking by scoring all the key pinfalls, first teaming with Choshu & Kantaro Hoshino to

beat Dick Murdoch & Bob Orton & Scott Hall, and followed it up with a victory in the championship match over Tatsumi Fujinami & Shinya Hashimoto & Masa Chono. The televised matches from the tournament ranged from average-to-good, but nothing stood out as in years past.

On the All Japan side, things were average as well. The lack of quality teams led to a lack of quality matches. The tournament finale, before an announced crowd of 12,700 at Tokyo's Budokan Hall

on December 16 saw the one outstanding match of the tournament, as Hansen & Gordy captured the crown beating Tenryu & new partner Toshiaki Kawada in a sensational 22 minute match when Hansen pinned Tenryu after a lariat. The win also brought the Hansen & Gordy duo recognition as PWF World tag team champions since former champions Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu had voluntarily given up the straps when they lost their tournament match to Tenryu & Kawada six days earlier in Sapporo.

1988 WRESTLING OBSERVER AWARDS

CATEGORY A -- WINNERS JUDGED ON TOTAL POINTS, FIVE POINTS FOR EACH FIRST PLACE VOTE, THREE POINTS FOR EACH SECOND PLACE VOTE AND TWO POINTS FOR EACH THIRD PLACE VOTE

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. AKIRA MAEDA (223)	1,304
2. Ric Flair (75)	712
3. Tatsumi Fujinami (26)	608
4. Randy Savage (66)	597
5. Ted DiBiase (41)	510

Honorable Mention: Jerry Lawler 164, Owen Hart 161, Bruiser Brody 155, Chigusa Nagayo 124, Eddie Gilbert 85, Barry Windham 72, Sting 66

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Harley Race
 1981 - Ric Flair
 1982 - Ric Flair
 1983 - Ric Flair
 1984 - Ric Flair
 1985 - Ric Flair
 1986 - Ric Flair
 1987 - Riki Choshu

There are more reasons to vote Akira Maeda first than anyone else and there's really only one reason that can be given not to. How can one give a Wrestler of the Year award to someone who only wrestled about a half-dozen matches all year, all in the last seven months of the year? Clearly, picking first here is the question of whether or not to vote for Maeda, since nobody else has had any impact on the business anywhere close to Maeda's level, and he can hardly be graded down for having a lack of effort, lack of skill, or for a lack of having good matches. I was going to pick Maeda third, marking him down for only having a half-dozen matches, but in the overall scheme of things, nobody else is deserving of the award and taking everything into consideration, nobody, in any year, has had the impact upon the business that Maeda has had this year. Taking it all into account, Maeda is as clear a choice this year as Ric Flair was all those previous years. It's a lot harder to choose a second place finisher. I hate to leave Randy Savage out of the top three, because in many ways he deserves the award for the U.S. alone, but with the exception of the DiBiase feud, his title matches were no better than Hogan's. For night-after-night consistency plus involvement in most of the key angles on the pay-per-view shows, DiBiase is also a strong candidate. And even though Savage was more significant, I'd pick DiBiase above him since his work was better all-around. Even though few did, I considered Hulk

Hogan. He is still the No. 1 draw in pro wrestling, at least on this continent. I didn't consider him for first, but the guy is still the most important wrestler in the U.S. business, work rate aside. Tatsumi Fujinami made his stand this year and had excellent matches. Ric Flair did as well, and by the time the year was out, was still as good a wrestler as there was around. I wound up picking Fujinami second and DiBiase third, but Flair, Savage and Hogan were all very close in the running.

MARK MADDEN: Wrestling as reality? Sellouts every card for a promotion that had to restart after an abysmal failure the first time out? A tough-guy reputation forged from the remnants of a cowardly act? How has Akira Maeda done all this? And how could anyone else be Wrestler of the year?

GARY ZIMAK: Although I don't agree with the way he went about putting himself in the position to be Wrestler of the Year, I have to give this award to Maeda. His selfish cheap shot on Choshu is the type of thing that could really jeopardize the concept of working a match. However, from that point on he knew what the people wanted and went for it when the opportunity presented itself. From that point on, he became THE wrestler that everybody in Japan wanted to see.

SMM: A battle between Tatsumi Fujinami and Akira Maeda in my book. I've been jumping back and forth over this one, but I'll have to go with Maeda because of his impact in reforming the UWF. So far, he's stayed away from the mistakes of last time, and actually brought the UWF to legitimate pro sports status in a lot of people's eyes. Fujinami is the best wrestler in the world right now. I thought he fell off a bit in 1987, but he picked back up this year. I picked Genichiro Tenryu third as his popularity is right up there in Japan and I love his in-ring style. A couple others who deserve mention are Ted DiBiase, who is great in the ring, but that doesn't matter a bit in Titan, and Eddie Gilbert, who had impact everywhere he's been this year.

SCOTT WILLIAMS: Nobody really stood out as a major influence on wrestling this year. I'll pick Ted DiBiase first as he was the center around several major WWF angles and by the end of the

year had established himself as a major fixture in wrestling among WWF fans, most of whom didn't know who he was 15 months ago.

NEIL NEWMAN: Ric Flair is consistently perfect in his interviews and ring work despite constant morale problems within the NWA. The fact he's had to carry matches with an inexperienced Sting and muscle-bound Luger shows he's truly the "Total Package."

BILL KUNKEL: Ted DiBiase finally wrestled as a complete package, with a classic angle, solid interviews and great matches against Hogan and Savage. This was his year.

SCOTT HUDSON: There can be no question in my mind about Akira Maeda here. No other wrestler could form a promotion and in one year turn it into the hottest one around. Owen Hart gets second based on the first-half of the year. Randy Savage gets third. Everyone expected Titan to disintegrate when Hogan went away, but it didn't and I think Savage was a big part of that.

JON KARESH: Ted DiBiase didn't have the impact like Akira Maeda had, but he did something no other wrestler has done. He maintained his wrestling skills after joining Titan. He was one of the few, if not the only bright spot in the largest and most powerful promotion. He had an excellent gimmick and tremendous ability and drew heat and crowds. His feud with Savage gave fans something they almost never see, a good main event on a Titan card. Nothing can be added about Maeda. We'll see in 1989 whether he was a fluke or something which will last for the long haul. Third goes to Flair. He did the best he could and frequently rose above the booking. At the very least, he always had good matches. With Dusty gone, my money is on Flair to be the winner next year.

DAVID LEVIN: When you take into consideration that his name alone means automatic sellouts and that Antonio Inoki is scrambling to catch up in the popularity battle, then you realize what level of stardom Akira Maeda has reached. Not only is he popular, but he delivers in the ring. That's all you can ask for. I picked Chigusa Nagayo second. Her matches are, or were, electric and the fans were involved beyond belief. She is the pinnacle of women's wrestling in the world. Even though Ric Flair is the most misused wrestler in the world, he still deserves third, simply because nobody else comes close in overall talent and charisma. If packaged right in 1989 by Turner's boys, Flair could pass the Hulkster in name recognition. That might only be wishful thinking on my part, but the potential is certainly there.

BOB CLOSSON: This is one of the easiest to pick. Akira Maeda has been the story in Japan starting with his infamous kick to Choshu's eye, his departure from New Japan and the resurfacing of the UWF without Satoru Sayama. Maeda is also a great wrestler and very deserving of the top spot.

SKEEVE: Maeda has done it again. Just when we thought he was out of the business, he shocks us by making the concept of shooting a smashing success.

JOHN JANCE: Akira Maeda gets it for using his well-earned reputation to start the UWF, a gamble that paid off in business, publicity and respect.

Hopefully by showing the way wrestling should be, others may take note in 1989.

TERESA DEMARIE: Maeda is the only guy I can think of who really deserved the award. He started a maverick promotion and made a success out of it, better than anyone could have believed or predicted.

ROLAND MESSIER: I have to pick Maeda first for several reasons. First, he easily had the most impact on the business of all the wrestlers. To be the main draw of a new outlaw type of promotion which had such stunning success without television is saying a lot, and to be responsible for creating such interest so quickly is simply incredible. His inside and outside the ring exploits have made him sort of a cult hero. Even though he wrestles rarely and irregularly due to the promotion's style, he still had high quality matches. His style of wrestling is also very difficult and demanding on the body, which deserves much consideration. His desire to create more realistic and athletic professional wrestling should also be commended.

ED VARNER: Bruiser Brody's murder was the biggest news story of the year in both the United States and Japan and had the largest impact on the wrestling world as a whole. With his death, the future of several independent promotions was in jeopardy while Japan lost its No. 1 international draw. The lives of several wrestlers have been significantly affected because of his death. His ring style and work continued to be among the best in the business at the time of his death, and he continued to be a top draw around the world.

JEFF BOWDREN: As I see it, only four choices stand out. Ted DiBiase has been great to watch all year and has certainly fulfilled the qualifications for this award. He is more deserving than Titan's other candidate, Randy Savage. Savage looked great when working with Ted, but his work faded after the feud ran its course. Tatsumi Fujinami was able to accomplish his goal is noteworthy while maintaining a high standard in the ring. However, the clear cut winner must be Maeda. He took a promotion from scratch, with only three wrestlers and no television and was able to make it the hottest promotion in the world. In today's wrestling market, which is so dominated by television, his success is particularly noteworthy.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: The choice for the top three is very close and the order is almost interchangeable. First pick is Eddie Gilbert, when one takes into account the role he played in two promotions, both of which were in very bad shape. His feud with Lawler gave the CWA a shot-in-the-arm while one only has to look at the CWF before he came and after he left to see his impact there. He also worked top quality matches. Second is Maeda. One can't overlook the success of the UWF. The only reason I don't pick him first is that he didn't work the first five months of the year. While one might question his shoot-kick start, his recent loss to Takada shows he is willing to do what is best for the company's long-term success and put ego aside. Third is Fujinami. There is no doubt he's the best wrestler of the three and the fact he gained a

temporary power victory over one of the greatest egos this business has ever seen merits him consideration for this award. With the exception of Flair, I don't think there is another wrestler in the business as good as carrying poor opponents to good matches.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Ric Flair is the only wrestler alive that I consider it a privilege to see live. Akira Maeda gets second for turning a cheap shot into a profitable promotion. I wouldn't even want to imagine what his body feels like the day after a match. Tatsumi Fujinami gets third for battling the toughest opponent around, Antonio Inoki's ego.

TOM ROBINSON: Akira Maeda's impact has rocked 1988. I picked DiBiase second for being in the limelight all year and maintaining an excellent work rate. Eddie Gilbert's work before joining the NWA puts him third.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Although Ric Flair is my favorite active wrestler, he comes in a close second to DiBiase. Both are excellent on the mike and the canvas. The nod goes to Ted because of the importance of his participation in the major Titan angles and houses, especially during the absence of the promotion's top star. Also, he was nearly as responsible as Elizabeth's legs for the fans acceptance of Savage as a worthy champion. Third goes to Maeda, who I would have picked first if the UWF had come into existence earlier in the year.

STEVE SIMS: Maeda has had more influence on the wrestling business than anyone else while keeping his matches interesting and keeping his work rate high. I think the clearest way to see just how much influence Maeda and his UWF have had is to see the rapid changes in the work style of All Japan, New Japan and the Japanese women. The kicking/submission style that the UWF pushes now dominates these other three promotions as well. DiBiase gets second and Savage gets third. If they'd just give him somebody besides Akeem and Andre to work with, we could see how good he really is as champion.

CHRIS ZAVISA: I am fully aware that my choice of Bruiser Brody cannot be intellectually defended using only the facts. It is a pure emotional choice. For the last dozen years the man was a giant in the profession. He probably at some point would have won this award but it never happened. If the traditional criteria were used, I would vote for either Fujinami or Flair for their efforts late in the year to rebel against the staid leadership in their promotions and use their power to reshape their sport into something better.

STEVE YOHE: I've got the tape of his cheap shot kick on Riki Choshu, and I think Akira Maeda's a punk because of it, but he created his own organization and seems to be pushing the wrestling world back to a harder form of wrestling.

PAUL HANLIN: Based on ability, impact, or both, Akira Maeda must win. True, he didn't work for half the year, but what he's done while being active clinches it for him. Owen Hart gets second, and he was even better last year. I hate leaving out DiBiase or Fujinami for third, but Bruiser Brody deserves a vote. He was a true maverick, an original and someone who will never be replaced.

RON LEMIEUX: Randy Savage became a great asset for Vince as he took over as the main draw while Hulk Hogan was on sabbatical. Lawler brought some dignity and meaning to the AWA title and Sting will be the wrestler of the future in the NWA.

MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER

- 1. TATSUMI FUJINAMI (177) 1,158
- 2. Owen Hart (109) 868
- 3. Ric Flair (111) 832
- 4. Ted DiBiase (47) 738
- 5. Barry Windham (20) 258

Honorable Mention: Keiichi Yamada 207, Tiger Mask 162, Bobby Eaton 105, Chigusa Nagayo 99, Nobuhiko Takada 96

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - Ric Flair
- 1987 - Ric Flair

This is a lot harder this year than in years past. First off, Owen Hart would have been the clear winner in my book based on the first seven or eight months of the year, but after the past few months, it's hard to justify a first place vote for him. Now, I don't think Hart is the "best" on his best night nor in the league of several wrestlers like Ric Flair, Barry Windham or Ted DiBiase as a complete wrestler, but his knack for always having good matches (before the days of the Blue Blazer) and always having different matches and not being predictable placed him above Flair, who is more fluid and more ring wise, but too predictable; and DiBiase, whose matches with Randy Savage were all basically the same and the rest of his bouts mainly consisted of him carrying foes to good matches. In comparing Flair with DiBiase, for all the criticism of Flair, his "average" house show match was a lot better than DiBiase's "average" house show match, and I don't think Flair had any better guys to work with. Fujinami also had good matches with less-than-great foes, and they were different, but his "average" match to me wasn't as good as Flair's, either. What he did in carrying Inoki for 60 minutes exceeds anything Flair, DiBiase or Hart did all year, and he was consistently good. Barry Windham is also in the league and in some ways was better than any of them. Keiichi Yamada is also in that league and Bobby Eaton is super in his role, while Tiger Mask had hot matches until the last two months of the year. Judging for an entire year, Flair gets the pick, with DiBiase second and Hart third, but Fujinami and Windham are also all at the same level.

MARK MADDEN: Whether wrestling all-out in Japan or in the WWF's invisible straight jacket, nobody displayed more ring ability than Owen Hart. I just hope he finds someplace where he can display it all the time and still make the same money.

GARY ZIMAK: In terms of what goes on between the ropes, it's pretty hard to top what Tatsumi Fujinami does. He is a master tactician and is almost never involved in a bad match. I would personally like to see him in the top position in Japan, but after so many years of playing second fiddle to Inoki, I wonder if the

fans will ever accept him as the top man. I chose Flair second despite the fact his matches have gotten so repetitious. The performance that he gives in the ring, even though we've all seen the same moves many times, must still be acknowledged as one of the best in the business. In terms of smoothness and fluid execution of moves, DiBiase is as consistent as they come. His performance, while not as reckless and inspired as Flair, illustrates how wrestling moves should be performed. As with Flair, he has a tendency to be repetitive but I must acknowledge his overall performance just the same.

SMM: If there is one man who embodies the word "wrestler," it is Fujinami. The guy is the best in the world. DiBiase is flawless in the ring and everything he does looks good. Tiger Mask has a great mix of good wrestling with almost suicidal flying moves and this past year was finally given more of a chance to display his ability. Hiro Hase was a strong contender until his injuries, Terry Taylor was coming into his own until Titan and Keiichi Yamada is a great wrestler, but he's held back to being little more than a glorified jobber.

REX REED: Ric Flair. If this is for best worker, you have to consider the physical work but also the mental aspects of doing the right stuff at the right time.

DAVID LEVIN: Tatsumi Fujinami is so technically sound that he can make 99 percent of his matches three-stars or better, and with opponents like Big Van Vader to carry, that's quite a statement.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Ric Flair bucked a grueling schedule, backstage politics and less-than-spectacular opponents, yet never left his work shoes home. Isn't it ironic that the man spent most of the year carrying someone called The Total Package? Owen Hart is second for sheer athletic ability. He's got a ways to go in the more subtle aspects of ring psychology to catch up with Flair.

ROLAND MESSIER: This is a lot tougher category than Wrestler of the Year. Ric Flair quickly comes to mind in that he had many good matches, but not as many great ones as I'm accustomed to seeing. The over-predictability of his matches hurt him. Tiger Mask was considered, but was involved in too many sub par matchups. Ted DiBiase had great matches with Randy Savage but never shined as much with other opponents. Keiichi Yamada and Shiro Koshinaka had a solid work rate but need more polish. My top pick is Fujinami, who seems like a tireless machine constantly pumping out one high-quality match after another. He never ceases to amaze me with his fluidity.

BOB CLOSSON: Owen Hart should be the fastest rising star in wrestling and he'd better get the award this year because he's got no chance of getting it next year. The key word is wrestle, and Hart is the best at that. His reputation begins with acrobatics but he also has proven he's great on the mat. Just look at the number of marathon matches he worked in Calgary.

SKEEVE: Fujinami's matches with other outstanding wrestlers like Murdoch and Choshu make him number 1, but he's also the miracle worker that carries Van Vader. Chigusa Nagayo gets second. She's great all-around, but one thing I'm particularly impressed with is how she sells a body part for a

long time after her opponent has been working on it.

TERESA DEMARIE: Owen Hart is superb and often doesn't get the credit he deserves because he's too new to have psychology mastered. But the guy puts out night-after-night and works as hard as anybody. His move to Titan has hurt him, but that's due to the opponents and the limitations. Ric Flair is starting to show his age but still works hard. DiBiase had some excellent matches this year and even made a Hulk Hogan match tolerable for me, and that alone gives him a top three spot.

JEFF BOWDREN: Owen Hart's work has pretty much ground to a halt since he came to Titan and Flair has survived a lot of the year on his reputation. Consequently, my third choice is Keiichi Yamada, second is Tiger Mask and first is Tatsumi Fujinami.

TOM ROBINSON: Owen Hart gets first. DiBiase is an idol of mine and he's tops night-after-night. Hiroshi Hase gets third. He's at his best working with Owen Hart, and in fact, outshone Hart in some of their matches. Bobby Fulton should be mentioned for effort and Bobby Eaton as well. I would have voted for Grizzly Boone, but he's slowed down since joining the NWA.

STEVE SIMS: I think Ted DiBiase had a great year. Some of his matches were repeats, but not nearly on the level as Flair. Hiroshi Hase represents to me the best overall wrestler, though, and Keiichi Yamada has the most potential.

CHRIS ZAVISA: When Satoru Sayama retired, I had a built-in resentment of anyone else wearing his stripes. I was quickly impressed by Misawa's acrobatics, but his technical ability was only passable and he never really seemed to put it all together. His repeated injuries reduced him to a colorless mid-card performer, but forced him to improve his technical wrestling and kicking ability. In 1988, he returned to health, reintroduced the acrobatics and showed all-around ability worthy of anyone in the business. Some of his high spots are more spectacular than even Sayama. Second goes to Barry Windham. In my opinion, he's the best American wrestler. He is technically excellent, works a great match and takes some of the best top rope bumps seen anywhere. His heel turn was flawless and never caused him to skip a beat. To this day, I wonder how such a despicable, know-it-all, braggart could have passed for a baby face for such a long time. Owen Hart gets third. He deserves higher when considering his talent, but he has the handicap of working for Titan and the double handicap of being severely held back.

PAUL HANLIN: Owen Hart, either with Stampede, New Japan or WWF outshone all but a few. He wins here based on working with the widest variety of opponents.

BEST BABY FACE

1. HULK HOGAN (156) 1,172
2. Sting (75) 851
3. Akira Maeda (117) 807
4. Randy Savage (47) 758
5. Chigusa Nagayo (63) 438

Honorable Mention: Anabolic Warrior 117, Rick Steiner 101, Elizabeth 77

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Dusty Rhodes
1981 - Tommy Rich
1982 - Hulk Hogan
1983 - Hulk Hogan
1984 - Hulk Hogan
1985 - Hulk Hogan
1986 - Hulk Hogan
1987 - Hulk Hogan

As a pure baby face, based on drawing heat and drawing crowds, Hulk Hogan is still the prototype. Yes, he's fallen from 1987, and probably will never draw 93,000 fans again, but he still is the only wrestler in this country whose name on a marquee makes a significant difference in the gate. And he owns the crowd far better than his competitors here. Akira Maeda isn't a pure baby face. He's a charismatic wrestler who doesn't portray baby face or heel but draws fans based on respect and admiration. It's a very different thing. Chigusa Nagayo, however, is an exceptional baby face, both in working a match like a baby face and in her appeal. Her appeal has fallen off from its peak, like Hogan, and she still generates a more amazing reaction and emotional response, and has more charisma in some ways. The battle for third is between Randy Savage, Anabolic Warrior and Sting. Of the three, Savage is the only one who has proven to be a legitimate drawing card at the gate. However, both Warrior and Sting got much better reactions from the live crowd. I'm going with Sting third based on the fact that he got over despite having a promotion that did nothing to help him, and then bungled everything up once he got there. At this point, however, I don't think Sting occupies this position anymore, as Warrior has far surpassed him as the charismatic, star of the future department due to having a better promotional push. The Warrior's biggest surge of popularity was after winning a title, while Sting was always made to come up short to the point where fans, at the end of the year, had lost confidence in his ability to ever win the big one. It's almost funny, but there are those who believe that Sting couldn't be a successful champion for reasons ranging from his name to his face paint, but winning a title sure didn't "kill" Hulk Hogan or the Ultimate Warrior, did it? Savage, on the other hand, was given the most important title in the game, yet most fans still consider Hogan the real champion, and the Warrior as the champion of the future, and Elizabeth as the baby face. Rick Steiner finished the year having the potential to break into this group, but unless he's pushed correctly, he'll be one of those fast shooting and equally fast fading stars.

ROLAND MESSIER: Just watching and hearing the reaction the Japanese fans give to Chigusa Nagayo gives me no other choice. The sympathy and heat she generates while getting thrashed is very impressive. I've never seen fans cry like that for Hulk Hogan.

GARY ZIMAK: Based on what has taken place with the formation and subsequent unbelievable success of the UWF this year, there is no way that I can give this to anyone but Maeda. His status in Japan, based on what he did to Choshu, is almost God-like. He capitalized on the Japanese fan's total obsession with the "shoot" to achieve a position for himself that nobody expected him to ever reach. As I've said, I don't agree with his method of achieving his current status, but the bottom line is he's the main man in Japanese wrestling and appears to be quite secure in that position. I chose Savage second for his ability to fill the shoes of Hogan. We all thought that after Wrestlemania, the WWF would take a major nosedive without the Hulkster, but somehow they managed to keep things going with Savage as the champ. Hogan comes in third because even though his popularity has diminished somewhat, he still pops the crowd like few others ever will.

LARRY LOVELL: Hulk Hogan is my first choice because his pre-match entrance and post-match posing can still pop crowds five years after his burst onto the national scene. I'll go with Sting second because he got over big without a major angle or push from the promotion. Rick Steiner gets third because of the way he got over with the fans long before he actually turned baby face.

JOHN JANCE: Hulk Hogan is the winner because of the large crowd he continues to draw. He is the franchise. Sting gets second, as though he received no push at all, his personality and performance turned him into a superstar. Randy Savage gets third. His unusual personality makes him a colorful champion and a far more worthy champion than his predecessor.

JEFF BOWDREN: I'm not voting for Hogan in part because he didn't work the entire year. The guy in the U.S. that impresses me is Sting, who through no reason outside of charisma, has become one of the most popular wrestlers in the business. The best in Japan are Inoki (more because he's a long-time national public figure than current popularity) and Chigusa Nagayo, who is the greatest now at actually playing sympathetic baby face in the ring.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Hulk Hogan is still the only name that can attract non-wrestling fans to a card and he's still the most recognizable name in the business. Imagine how popular Sting would have been if the promotion knew about it before the peak was gone? Like the Ultimate Warrior or not, he is over with the crowd, and ability has nothing to do with being a good baby face.

SMM: I don't take anything away for lack of drawing power. It seems like the people really get into Sting, but a little bit of help would have gone a long way. I picked Savage first. Chigusa Nagayo is a top contender but I don't like to, nor think it is fair, to vote a woman in with the men. If you are talking drawing power, than Maeda has to be considered as well.

REX REED: So Sting didn't draw big gates, he would have if anyone would have smartened up. It's not his fault.

NEIL NEWMAN: Although Hulk Hogan isn't the performer of years past, he's still the ultimate baby face for Titan and he turns crowds into a frenzy

ERNIE SANTILLI: The phenomenal success of the UWF and his incredible drawing power makes the selection of Akira Maeda an easy one. To be so "over" with a basically untested new-style opposition promotion to two firmly established promotions and without television is simply amazing.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Chigusa Nagayo is a phenomenon. She totally captures a crowd so that they live and die with her every movement. For all of Hogan's U.S. popularity, I've never seen half of the crowd with their heads shaven to emulate their balding idol. Hogan does sell tickets.

TOM ROBINSON: Akira Maeda gets first. I think he could sell out against Randy Mulkey, or even Tom Burke.

STEVE YOHE: Randy Savage was in the top spot in the WWF most of the year and did well. He seemed to take a lot of the heat away from Hulk Hogan. Most of the kids I talked to liked Savage over Hogan.

PAUL HANLIN: Maeda's the man here. He was at an obvious disadvantage in not having television to get himself over. Look at how much of a disadvantage that turned out to be. Sting gets second, in spite of Virge the Dirge.

RON LEMIEUX: Hogan gets third since he missed half the year. Sting as over as anyone could be in the NWA. Again, Savage gets first for the job he did replacing Hogan and getting over.

BEST HEEL

- 1. TED DIBIASE (162) 1,231
- 2. Eddie Gilbert (77) 603
- 3. Barry Windham (29) 364
- 4. Andre the Giant (30) 356
- 5. Rick Rude (21) 326

Honorable Mention: Ric Flair 261, Genichiro Tenryu 216, Big Bossman 114, Road Warriors 92, Tommy Rich 61

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Larry Zbyszko
- 1981 - Don Muraco
- 1982 - Buzz Sawyer
- 1983 - Michael Hayes
- 1984 - Roddy Piper
- 1985 - Roddy Piper
- 1986 - Michael Hayes
- 1987 - Ted DiBiase

After Dump Matsumoto retired in February, the business lacked a real heel of that magnitude. Andre the Giant was certainly a monster heel, but a pathetic one once you actually watched him. Jerry Lawler was a great working and talking heel in Dallas, but that was a part-time stint. If he went heel for a full year, he'd be very difficult to beat. Eddie Gilbert kind of was Jerry Lawler as a heel for most of the year, and was as effective as the limitations of where he was would allow. I don't consider Ric Flair a heel even though he does try to be and the promotion does attempt to portray him as such. He's

more like Maeda, minus the drawing power (although that isn't his fault either, Maeda wouldn't have half the drawing power Flair has if he'd have been misused as much or for that matter, been on top for 15 years in the same territory), but nobody has figured out the way to use him correctly to take advantage of his popularity. Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara were excellent heels, by the Japanese version of the word. Really, Tenryu carried All Japan all year long, making him the only heel to carry a promotion successfully for a long period of time. Rick Rude got awesome heat and has a great act. Ted DiBiase's act didn't get nearly the heat Rude's did, but he drew more fans, although one could argue he was put in a stronger position to draw fans. But based on what has been happening of late, the new guy who came into his own as the best drawing heel of the year at live shows was the Big Bossman. For overall, I'm going with Tenryu first for carrying a promotion, DiBiase second for overall ability, and Bossman nipping Gilbert for third by virtue of his drawing those big houses.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Barry Windham is snotty, arrogant and mean when he's playing the old-time serious heel.

BOB CLOSSON: The best ones were Andre, Gilbert, DiBiase and Rude. My first pick is Gilbert because he briefly turned around two promotions.

SKEEVE: Genichiro Tenryu doesn't have to get heat by stalling, eye gouging or pulling the trunks. He very naturally comes off as an arrogant prick in the ring by his wrestling alone.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: I have to give an honorable mention to Bull Nakano. If she was in another promotion or if Dump Matsumoto had never existed, she would be in the running for heel of the year.

JOHN JANCE: Andre may be a cartoon, but he's as imposing and over to the average mark as any act in memory. The hands in a simulated choke hold, the guttural voice, the blazing eyes and the yellow teeth to the job. Just as Hogan is a terrible wrestler, so is Andre.

TERESA DEMARIE: DiBiase plays his role well enough to win. Unfortunately, he doesn't quite get over with the WWF fans as they don't appreciate his subtle qualities, like wrestling ability. Andre gets second. He's got teeth that look like they haven't been brushed in years, sweats like Andre the Giant, does very menacing nasty interviews and can't wrestle a lick, but he can draw.

JEFF BOWDREN: The NWA was severely lacking in this category, as only Barry Windham seemed to inspire real hate. In titan, DiBiase was the best one. My first pick is Ashura Hara. This guy came off as the ultimate bully and every time I saw the guy, I got mad at him.

NEIL NEWMAN: The gimmick created for Ted DiBiase was excellent, but it still takes the right person to fill it and he shined. Had he done a similar gimmick with the NWA, he'd have been the perfect Horseman.

REX REED: Rude gets first because he got so much heat. Big Bossman gets second for the gates he'd drawn and Barry Windham's transformation into a wrestler with a personality gives him third.

SMM: When you can start riots, you must be good and more importantly, wherever Eddie Gilbert showed up as a heel this year, the place got hot and when he left, the place got cold.

GARY ZIMAK: For the work he did in Memphis and Continental, I have to pick Gilbert. He's a tremendous performer. His current role in the NWA is a travesty and I hate to see his talent wasted. DiBiase gets second for his out of the ring work which is as consistent as his work in the ring. Although Robert Fuller is totally overexposed, he's still a very good heel and gets my choice for third.

ROLAND MESSIER: Even though she was active for only three months, Dump Matsumoto is my pick. Nobody else even came close and really all the top male heels looked like choir boys in comparison.

MARK MADDEN: I can't consider Flair, although he's got the act down better than anyone, because the fans don't buy it. Windham got over more as a heel because he was previously such a good baby face. The combination of his smug heel routine combined with his betrayal of Luger made him number 1.

DAVID LEVIN: Ted DiBiase's gimmick is better suited for a manager, but he gets the job done. Rick Rude has a disgusting gimmick, but it works. Third is Andre the Giant. McMahon did a great job in turning Andre and he plays the part well. Even though, he should not be let near a ring again in his lifetime.

ERNIE SANTILLI: I judge a good heel by his despicableness backed up by a combination of drawing power and work rate. For doing so much with so little, I chose Eddie Gilbert first. Ric Flair really tried to be hated in '88 and I dread the idea of him as a baby face, but I think his well-deserved popularity works against him in this category.

SCOTT HUDSON: Andre the Giant, remember, ring work doesn't count. His facial expressions are without peer and his heat surprised me. Rick Rude never fails to crack me up with his, "Stop the music, hit the music," routine.

STEVE SIMS: DiBiase is just great in his role of "What Vince McMahon would be like if he actually was a wrestler."

CHRIS ZAVISA: The one constant in the WWF is the exceptional work of DiBiase. The gimmick is solidly over and DiBiase gave it his all throughout the year. His matches with Savage were overrated, but still good. His interviews are usually good and the average fan certainly hates him. Crockett's top heel, Flair, doesn't get a vote since he's openly cheered often by more than half the crowd. Windham gets the second spot because of his excellent transformation from a Golden Boy baby face into a Horseman. Genichiro Tenryu had a hot year, especially at the end. His projection of arrogance is among the finest of the Japanese wrestlers.

STEVE BEVERLY: I'm voting for only the last quarter of the year, but the Road Warriors are showing they still have it in them. Ted DiBiase gets second. Even though Wrestlemania and Summer Slam diluted him, he did some of the best heel work of the past few years. Tommy Rich gets third. So what if he talks like Ali.

STEVE YOHE: Everyone in the WWF revolves around DiBiase. Andre is still the second biggest draw in wrestling and gets great heat. I think he's a good actor, also. Rude made Jake Roberts a headliner again. Fans are both repelled and drawn to him at the same time.

FEUD OF THE YEAR

1. MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. FANTASTICS (129) 1068
2. Randy Savage vs. Ted DiBiase (107) . . . 875
3. Jerry Lawler vs. Eddie Gilbert (40) . . . 401
4. Tenryu-Hara vs. Tsuruta-Yatsu (26) . . . 271
5. Ric Flair vs. Sting (15) 208

Honorable Mention: Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude 201, Midnight Express vs. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson 168, Midnight Express vs. Original Midnight Express 161, Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich 109, Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger 85

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko
- 1981 - Andre the Giant vs. Killer Khan
- 1982 - Ted DiBiase vs. Junkyard Dog
- 1983 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
- 1984 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
- 1985 - Ted DiBiase vs. Jim Duggan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan vs. Paul Orndorff
- 1987 - Jerry Lawler vs. Tommy Rich & Austin Idol

This hasn't been the year for the mega-feud which is an easy pick in this category. The closest thing to a winner was the DiBiase vs. Savage feud. It had a lot of good matches, although there were some average ones as well, and drew well for most of the summer, until it, and DiBiase, were beat into the ground. As for other contenders in my book: Fantastics vs. Midnight of course was the best wrestling feud of the year, but it wasn't put in a position where it could draw money, and even if it was, it's questionable the Fantastics could every really draw by themselves; Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude had a great angle to set it up and great heat between the two, and drew decent considering its positioning. Some of the matches must have been good as well, but the ones I saw didn't fit into even the category of decent. Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich was a great idea to have the feud itself, but nobody had ideas on what to do once they came up with the original idea. Actually, considering the non-finishes of Death matches and "must be a winner" matches and the whole unification, this was more of a rip-off feud of the year, even if some of the matches were good. Lawler vs. Gilbert was the best thing on the small circuits. Over in Japan, Inoki vs. Fujinami was an interesting feud climaxed with one interesting match, but it seemed they avoided pushing it too hard for obvious reasons. On the other hand, the Tsuruta vs. Tenryu thing, with Yatsu and Hara involved, was pushed almost to death, but give the guys

credit. The matches were almost all great and the heat was excellent, and it drew as good as anything did this year with All Japan. Anyway, first goes to Savage vs. DiBiase because of the gates and the quality of matches, second goes to Midnight vs. Fantastics since they had the best matches of the year, and third goes to Tsuruta & Yatsu vs. Tenryu & Hara since they had good matches, clean finishes when they had to, and drew well enough.

SCOTT WILLIAMS: Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage gets first. I'd have picked Midnight vs. Fantastics if they hadn't done the same thing with Bill Watts in 1985. Kerry Von Erich vs. Jerry Lawler was third. They had good matches and kept me interested simply because I always wondered how they were going to get out of each match without either man losing his title.

SMM: Every time Tenryu & Hara wrestled Tsuruta & Yatsu, it was brutal, great and what wrestling should be like. I also really liked the Karachi Vice vs. Hart mafia feud in Stampede, especially the eight and 10 man matches earlier in the year. Johnny Smith and Chris Benoit had a great wrestling feud. They wrestled about eight weeks in a row on television and each match was totally different.

GARY ZIMAK: The Lawler-Gilbert feud was simply tremendous. I enjoyed everything about this feud, from the interviews, the angles and most of the matches. I have to give Midnight Express vs. Fantastics second. If this category was based solely on quality of matches, this would be one of the best in many years.

MARK MADDEN: It was a slow year for good feuds, but a great year for Midnight Express feuds. Give credit to the Fantastics. The feud had it all, great angles, great heat, great matches and great interviews. Midnight vs. Anderson & Blanchard didn't have a lot of matches, although they would have been great, but the Cornette-Dillon confrontations and Bobby getting beaten up in the dressing room gave this second place.

ROLAND MESSIER: Michael Hayes vs. Buddy Roberts had good matches, great angles, great interviews and kept me interested even though it petered out by the end of the year.

BILL KUNKEL: The best matches anywhere were Midnight vs. Fantastics, but there was no real heat here, or anywhere else in pro wrestling in 1988.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Ric Flair vs. Sting gets my first place vote for several reasons. First is the tremendous heat in the buildings when they met. Second, this is the match that headlined the show that Ko'd Wrestlemania IV. Finally, it was the only Ric Flair feud all year where I was able to let myself believe that the title might change hands.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Midnight Express vs. Fantastics had great ring work, good interviews and a story line that actually had a beginning, a middle and an end. Midnight Express vs. Blanchard & Anderson was great while it lasted.

BOB CLOSSON: Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich was one of the most unique feuds ever in wrestling, since both got to be the baby face in their home area. But recognizing attendance as well as match performance, Savage vs. DiBiase gets first.

JOHN JANCE: Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich gets first. The idea of a title unification is noteworthy. Both men have their strengths and did produce some interesting matches, even with all the hokey endings. It's not easy to maintain interesting matches in so many different cities having different roles to play and with two of the bigger egos around. They carried off unification of two "Who cares" titles with more professionalism than either title deserved.

TERESA DEMARIE: Midnight Express vs. Midnight Express. Great angles, great managers, great workers and great matches. DiBiase vs. Savage gets second as they had great matches and drew big money. Hogan vs. Bossman gets third. They wouldn't know what a great match is if they stumbled into one, but it was profitable.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: I picked Midnight vs. Fantastics over Savage vs. DiBiase as it seemed they had more outstanding matches. Benoit vs. Smith gets third as all their matches were outstanding, even though they didn't have the box office appeal of either of the first two.

ERNIE SANTILLI: The Midnight Express vs. Fantastics generated more heat and hard work than the entire card in most promotions. Second goes to Savage vs. DiBiase, which drew bigger houses, but was inconsistent in comparison.

STEVE SIMS: Midnight vs. Fantastics probably had the best night-in/night-out matches of the year with lots of heat. DiBiase vs. Savage carried the world's No. 1 promotion for six months. Fujinami vs. Inoki is mainly a behind-the-scenes feud.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Midnight vs. Fantastics had everything you could ask for. Two extremely talented teams, one of which is the acknowledged best in the world and the other made up of two over-achievers hell-bent on doing anything they can to get over in the big-time. Their bouts were filled with great teamwork, endless new high spots and enough innovation to write a few new chapters in the textbook on tag team wrestling. The addition of Jim Cornette was just an added component to make this feud great. Nothing else came close, but I'll give second to Tenryu & Hara vs. Tsuruta & Yatsu. They had an exceptionally fine series of matches over the last few months with everyone, even Tsuruta, putting out. Savage vs. DiBiase was overrated by most fans. They had two exceptional bouts, many good ones and more than a few stinkers along the way. But the good moments were enough to give them third.

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

- 1. BOBBY EATON & STAN LANE (309)1,705
- 2. The Fantastics (31) 705
- 3. Arn Anderson & Tully Blanchard (13) . 570
- 4. The Foot Loose (15) 411
- 5. Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara (20) . 292

Honorable Mention: Road Warriors 187, Crush Gals 90, Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond 79, Rockers 66, Samoan Swat Team 65

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Terry Gordy & Buddy Roberts
- 1981 - Terry Gordy & Jimmy Snuka
- 1982 - Stan Hansen & Ole Anderson
- 1983 - Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood
- 1984 - Road Warriors
- 1985 - Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith
- 1986 - Bobby Eaton & Dennis Condrey
- 1987 - Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane

I've got four teams to consider here, all interchangeable in their order of positioning. The Midnight Express (Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane version) do get my first pick, for consistently having good matches and hot feuds. Their bouts are helped by having Jim Cornette in the corner to act as a distraction so fans don't realize when the slow spots are taking place. The Fantastics came into their own this year as the hard-working preliminary tag team of the NWA. They did everything humanly possible, and really some things inhumanly possible, in an attempt to get over. Unfortunately, too many people saw them as Rock & Roll Express copies, and while they couldn't have done any better, they were trapped by timing and that perception. Still, they had great matches all year long. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson were a consistent, great working duo that always seemed to do the right thing at the right time. The fourth team I'm considering is The Foot Loose. In some ways they aren't as ring wise as the other three, but make up for it with the kind of effort that makes for great matches. They also had the disadvantage in that for the most part, they didn't work against nearly the quality of opposition as the aforementioned threesomes, yet their matches don't take a back seat to anyone's. Because of that, they get second, while for inhuman effort, Fantastics nip Blanchard & Anderson for third.

SMM: Every match I've seen Tenryu & Hara in was in the four-star range and brutal, also. Same goes for Kawada & Fuyuki. These four really elevated the quality of Baba's promotion. I gave Anderson & Blanchard third, since they were similar in style to Tenryu & Hara, good, hard, well executed solid wrestling.

GARY ZIMAK: In terms of functioning as a tag team, I've never seen individuals work as well together as the Midnight Express. Their unique blend of imaginative moves and athletic ability makes an excellent combination. I must pick Fantastics second, who are among the hardest workers in the business and are constantly improving. Tully & Arn get third for their capability of making almost every match they are involved in a great one.

SCOTT HUDSON: The Midnight Express was so impressive that they may win next year without even working a match.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Nobody can come close to the Midnight Express. They're the Total Packages of tag teams.

TOM ROBINSON: Without a doubt, the Midnight Express are the best tag team of my time.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Eaton & Lane are the textbook on tag team wrestling. Both have great individual abilities and they combine it with flawless teamwork. Their never ending series of innovative high spots are a source of wonder. The one constant in

Crockett's crumbling promotion was the excellence of this team. Throwing in the best manager of all-time completes this package. Tenryu & Hara surprised me since I've become disinterested in Baba's promotion over the past two years. But both combined to have some great bouts and rivalled Maeda's outfit for realism and brutality. The Fantastics are the best bargain Crockett ever signed. For the first half of the year they were as hot as any act and provided several videotapes worth of highlights. After bouncing around the minor leagues, they finally made it to the big time and worked their butts off proving that they more than belonged.

JOHN CORRIGAN: Midnight Express had the best work-rate, the best variety, the best manager, the best angles, the best everything.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane deserve all the accolades they receive and more. Blanchard & Anderson gets second. The Fantastics get third. I hate teenybopper tag teams but these guy intense work ethic won me over.

BOB CLOSSON: The Midnight Express is the best tag team of the 80s and the best part is they never rest on their laurels and are always coming up with fresh moves.

TERESA DEMARIE: It's dangerous at the top because there's only one place to go, but the Midnight Express aren't going anywhere. Tully & Arn are the most realistic working team and always put on a good show. Fantastics try hard every time out and you can't help but like them, but Rogers still smiles too much

STEVE YOHE: I'm impressed at how hard The Fantastics work every night. They act like they love their job and can use the support.

PAUL HANLIN: The Fantastics had a tough time because they had a major stigma to overcome by being perceived by fans as copycats of the Rock & Roll Express. In this case, the replacements were far better than the originals. Eaton & Lane are second, but they are the best U.S. tag team of this era.

MOST IMPROVED

- 1. STING (124) 925
- 2. Rick Steiner (63) 561
- 3. Biff Wellington (46) 507
- 4. Samson Fuyuki (71) 485
- 5. Chris Benoit (15) 289

Honorable Mention: Lex Luger 268, Keiichi Yamada 108, Johnny Ace 102, Paul Roma 87, Steve Cox 84, Big Van Vader 81, Mike Rotunda 75, Dan Kroffatt 75, Jeff Jarrett 68

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Larry Zbyszko
- 1981 - Adrian Adonis
- 1982 - Jim Duggan
- 1983 - Curt Hennig
- 1984 - The Cobra
- 1985 - Steve Williams
- 1986 - Rick Steiner
- 1987 - Big Bubba Rogers (Big Bossman)

I'm looking for the biggest improvement over the past year in the ring. Rick Steiner had a tremendous personality improvement and he is a better wrestler now as well, whereas Sting has improved, but his improvement over the past year wasn't anymore than twice as much as one would expect from someone in his position. Lex Luger, on the other hand, while not a great wrestler yet, made tremendous strides in the past year. His conditioning has improved to the point it's gone from a butt of jokes to no longer being mentioned as a fault. He's gotten to where he handles basic wrestling at a credible main eventer level. His biggest fault, wasn't really his, it was that he was pushed too hard, too fast, and was expected by too many promoters, bookers, fans and magazine writers to be Hulk Hogan. Then, when he wasn't, he was considered a disappointment. Still, he'd have been a big star whether he improved or not, and give him credit, because two years ago he was a main eventer and a laughing stock as a worker, and last year at this time he was, at best, a fair worker. Big Van Vader was terrible when he came to Japan, and isn't too bad now, but that's as far as it goes. Chris Benoit was good a year ago, and he's great right now. Hiroshi Hase took off this year, but his take-off was grounded by injuries, while Keiichi Yamada wasn't grounded all year, expect in being held back by the promotion. I always thought Dan Kroffatt was pretty good, but he really was impressive in Japan and Puerto Rico as the year came to a close. Toshiaki Kawada had been a great worker last year, but this was the year that everyone figured it out. However, his partner, Samson Fuyuki, gets first place here. He went from being a well below-average wrestler in the middle of last year, to a good wrestler as the year opened, to one of the hardest workers and a member of as good a team as there is within the first few months of the past year. Second goes to Benoit and third goes to Kroffatt, beating out Luger and Biff Wellington.

REX REED: Every time I see Jeff Jarrett, I'm amazed at how good he is considering his dad was horrendous.

SMM: A few guys like Bob Orton and Kerry Von Erich came back around to being good again, John Tenta improved a lot in Japan and some young guys in Oregon like Avalanche, Steve Doll and Scott Peterson really improved. Tommy Rich seems to always wrestle better as a heel. Dan Spivey also improved. Samson Fuyuki went from a journeyman preliminary type and through tons of hard work, changed himself to where you could hardly recognize that he's the same person. Leon White as Big Van Vader also improved a lot and Mike Rotunda has turned into a real good heel.

GARY ZIMAK: Rick Steiner finally appears to be headed toward the stardom that I always envisioned for him. He's got tremendous athletic skills and finally has been given a role that seems to fit him. Once again, Sting has shown a considerable amount of improvement. If he continues to improve at his current pace, he'll be one of the better workers in the world in a few years. For what he's gone through and compared to where he was at this time last year, there is no way I can exclude Kerry Von Erich from the top three.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Lex Luger has gone from pretty poor to credible. He deserves a lot of credit for coming a long way this year. Rick Steiner im-

proved his ring persona more than his ring work, but went from a minor player to a major star.

ED VARNER: Avalanche started the year out as a green baby face but learned very quickly becoming maybe the best big man in wrestling today. He has developed ring savvy, has become a decent worker, takes good bumps, gives great interviews and has a good attitude.

TERESA DEMARIE: Bob Orton is probably the single most talented wrestler I've ever seen. He became a shell of himself in the WWF, but Japan has added much needed life to his career and I enjoyed his matches. Sting made great strides in the psychological aspects and Luger is now pretty tolerable, and considering from whence he came, that puts him in the top three.

JEFF BOWDREN: There don't seem to be a lot of candidates this year. John Tenta showed tremendous improvement early in the year but then it disappeared. Isao Takagi improved from being a total slug to someone who is now pretty decent. Sting and Steiner have improved, but not at a dramatic rate, but they are finally being discovered by the promotion. Chris Benoit has come into his own this year. Finally, top pick is Samson Fuyuki. He now is part of one of the best tag teams in the world.

MARK MADDEN: Keiichi Yamada was great last year, but I believe he's progressed to the point where he's one of wrestling's elite. He's gained strength and physique without losing any mobility or moves. Johnny Ace looks good in Florida. He's sometimes the only thing that keeps me awake while Gordon Solie rambles.

DAVID LEVIN: Samson Fuyuki gets first. The Footloose have become one of the top tag teams in the world over the past year and Fuyuki's improvement was a big part of that rise. Lex Luger gets second. When he's used in tag matches, where he can do his hot tags and parade outside the ring waiting for the tag, he's a very effective wrestler.

ERNIE SANTILLI: I agree with you that Sting is not yet a great one inside the ropes, yet he made excellent progress this year character-wise by incorporating the scorpion as "his" finisher and his trademark rebel yell. His interviews have dramatically improved. Most importantly, he's received solid fan support with minimal office help.

STEVE SIMS: Rick Steiner has gone from consistently good to often-great. Hiroshi Hase went from being great to probably being the best in the world. Lex Luger has gone from being unbearably bad just two years ago to fair one year ago to good now. He's not yet at the top, but I think he's improved a great amount the past two years.

CHRIS ZAVISA: For most of the year, Fuyuki kept climbing the ladder of success higher-and-higher. At the start of the year, he was rarely on television. Now his bouts are among the best in all of Japan. He and Kawada had dozens of very good bouts with all different types of foes. He reminds me of The Fantastics, working like a maniac to get over far beyond his abilities. For

most of the first six months, Sting showed remarkable improvement. I guess that's understandable when you are showcased against Ric Flair. However the NWA has put him on the shelf lately and it seems to have hurt his wrestling. Big Van Vader may have shown the most improvement of anyone. He had a long way to go to just become mediocre. Some of his matches now are even worth watching.

MOST UNIMPROVED

1. BAM BAM BIGELOW (70) 505
2. Greg Valentine (55) 473
3. Steve Williams (27) 259
4. Ricky Morton (18) 224
5. Anabolic Warrior (31) 213

Honorable Mention: Jim Duggan 200, Nikita Koloff 186, Kevin Von Erich 149, Terry Taylor 136, Dusty Rhodes 114, Don Muraco 110, Dino Bravo 98, Jerry Lawler 88, Riki Choshu 81, Junkfood Dog 80, Ken Patera 70

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Jimmy Snuka
- 1985 - Sgt. Slaughter
- 1986 - Bob Orton
- 1987 - Butch Reed

I can't really come up with many picks here that were too noticeable. Greg Valentine was boring last year, although he's gotten so dull that you almost would forget he's still around, except he shows up on television and there were those matches with Don Muraco. Muraco hasn't been good in four years, it's just that some people took a long time to realize it since he masqueraded it with an unnatural physique. Ultimate Warrior was never good, so how could he possibly get worse? I seem to be in the minority, and I realize Bam Bam Bigelow was totally misused, but he was good every time I saw him live or on tape against a decent foe, at least upon leaving Titan. A lot of those who went to Titan had their work rates drop. Terry Taylor was a top-10 wrestler when he went to Titan, but he's hasn't displayed that talent since he went there. Owen Hart was the best wrestler in the world when he went to Titan, but now he's just a decent preliminary wrestler. Jim Duggan was bad last year, but now he's downright awful, which is quite a shame if you ever watch Mid South tapes of the guy. Badnews Allen was a good worker, nothing special, but good. Now, he's not even that. Others who come to mind are: Randy Savage, as after the feud with DiBiase, he didn't do much, although he didn't exactly have the kind of opponents that would could get a good match out of; Jerry Lawler, who when he was "on," was still excellent, but was off a lot more than "on;" Riki Choshu, who got a little fat and lost his charisma; Ricky Morton, who was once a wrestler I would always look forward to watching because of his effort, but now is either injured, or just doesn't care to do it like he used to; Robert Gibson, who is even worse. But my first pick is a sad one, because it's one of the all-time greats of the business, who has destroyed his body for the business, and now broke, has to come back even though he has no chance to get over as he's too old looking and all wrong for the era--Harley Race, who was still a good worker last year. Second goes to Morton and third goes to Duggan.

REX REED: Nikita Koloff got worse every year for four years until he worked himself right out of the business.

SMM: I really hate to mention Ric Flair, but I guess when you are at the top for so long, you can only go down. I realize all the behind-the-scenes turmoil, hard travel and while solid as always, every time I've seen him, it has been the exact same routine over-and-over. I understand some of the opponents he had were bad and all, but it is still "Ric sells his ass off and does the same bumps" in every match. I was looking forward in the match with Midnight to seeing something different but it didn't happen.

MARK MADDEN: Bam Bam Bigelow was terrible in the WWF, and now wrestles like he's still there. I remember days when he was in Memphis and was absolutely terrifying. Now he's just another big fat guy.

TOM ROBINSON: Curt Hennig is still one of my favorites, but he doesn't work like he used to. Terry Taylor doesn't have much of a chance.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Prior to 1988, Steve Williams came across as an awe-inspiring combination of power and technique. He was a lock to be one of the game's future bright stars. This year he left with the impression that he is just killing time. I don't blame him for resenting the way he's been used since the UWF buy out, but I believe a man with his talent could have forced the issue of higher positioning by recruiting massive fan support the way Sting did.

STEVE SIMS: Has Jerry Lawler forgotten how to apply a wrestling hold? Since he beat Hennig, all he does are fists. Jim Duggan is now sad to watch and nothing like the 1985 Mid-South Hacksaw I used to love watching. Greg Valentine may simply be over-the-hill. Since his wonderful Wrestlemania match with Randy Savage, I haven't enjoyed anything he's been in.

LARRY LOVELL: Greg Valentine has showed a noticeable decline these past two years, but this year he was really boring and stale. It's too bad, because Greg was once a top-flight wrestler.

JOHN JANCE: Crockett should have never considered taking The Hammer back because his best years have passed him by. The decline actually had started in 1983 but now everyone notices.

TERESA DEMARIE: Owen Hart, it may not be his fault here, but you'd have a heart attack if you saw him in Stampede and saw the same wrestler now. Terry Taylor was such a talented heel and a really good worker, but now he's reduced to snide poultry jokes. This is one angle that laid an egg. Jim Duggan couldn't work a good match now if his live depended on it. Fortunately, it doesn't, or he'd be pushing up daisies.

JEFF BOWDREN: Last year's wrestler of the year, Riki Choshu, was buried by Inoki, beginning with the riot at the Sumo Hall. After that, Choshu seemed disinterested and his much-publicized rebelliousness has been cowed. Through no fault of his own, Owen Hart has gone

dramatically downhill. Terry Taylor has suffered a similar fate.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: It's sad for me to pick Valentine when I consider all the good matches I've seen him in the best. However, if you watch him today, he's a stale wrestler.

CHRIS ZAVISA: At this time last year, Williams was on the verge of superstardom. I've got to believe even Doc would simply like to throw away the entire year. His work rate declined badly. His brief feud with Ric Flair was totally forgettable, without a single memorable match. Even his interviews, which were the acknowledged worst in the business when the year started, somehow managed to get even worse. Greg Valentine has been sliding downhill for the past few years and 1988 was the period at the end of the sentence. Even Jimmy Hart and a television gimmick couldn't help him. Pop in an old Mid-Atlantic tape from seven years ago and you will not recognize the Greg Valentine of today. This could have been a big year for Randy Savage, but he never came close to rising to the occasion. Two great matches with Ted DiBiase do not a year make. Many of his matches were disappointing and some were bad. For a guy with a long-term rep as a great worker, he sure didn't show it.

PAUL HANLIN: Nikita Koloff went downhill faster than most of the U.S. ski team at Calgary.

JOE LANCELLO: Greg Valentine is more stale than month-old bread. Not that Nikita Koloff was ever that great to start with, but he became Samson in reverse. When the hair grew, the muscles went and so did the aura. And all of Dusty's booking couldn't put Nikita together again.

RON LEMIEUX: Badnews Brown, Greg Valentine and Don Muraco. All from the WWF and you could round out the top 10 from their WWF alone. Out of the three, Badnews went down the most since he was better than Valentine or Muraco at the beginning of the year.

MOST OBNOXIOUS

1. DUSTY RHODES (109)	755
2. David Crockett (85)	668
3. Vince McMahon (31)	324
4. Anabolic Warrior (27)	218
5. Gorilla Monsoon (20)	194

Honorable Mention: Ed Whalen 158, Hulk Hogan 125, Superstar Billy Graham 123, Larry Nelson 108, Carlos Colon 105, Brother Love 77, Jose Gonzales 75, Ricky Morton 60

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - "Judo" Gene LeBelle
- 1982 - David Crockett
- 1983 - Vince McMahon
- 1984 - Vince McMahon
- 1985 - Vince McMahon
- 1986 - Vince McMahon
- 1987 - David Crockett

There are those whose wrestling personalities come off as arrogant or obnoxious. There are those who make me switch stations. There are those who ruin wrestling promotions. There are even those who

embarrass me to be a fan of wrestling. There are even hardened criminals and promotional war-games that are so far beyond business competition it isn't funny. But Carlos Colon gets first. I could pick Jose Gonzales, but I won't, because no matter what eye witnesses said, it wasn't Jose Gonzales who brought Jose Gonzales back as booker while he was still being accused of Murder One. Even if it was self defense, and eye-witnesses say it wasn't, Colon should not have used his T.V. time to try and get Gonzales over as a baby face and he certainly shouldn't have brought him back to the promotion as a booker, at the very least until the trial had been completed. You can say innocent until proven guilty all you want, but you had a booker accused of killing one of the boys, with more than a dozen witnesses in the dressing room, several of whom have the exact same story the day after the event. Then, when the hearing for the indictment comes down, none, not one, including Colon, of the witnesses testified as to what happened. Where was the pressure being applied? Even if Colon wasn't obstructing justice and had nothing to do with witnesses being afraid to testify and the police investigation not really taking place, there is no excuse, none, for hiring back the accused while in the middle of all these strange occurrences with the case. I haven't even mentioned the fact Colon allowed Gonzales to wrestle the night of the alleged murder. Yes, he can use the excuse that he didn't know Brody was going to die, but he certainly did know he was stabbed in three vital organs and wasn't in good shape, either. But what of Sunday night in Mayaguez, the day after Brody died, when he was going to not only run the card, but allow Gonzales to work his match. Sorry, but Fritz Von Erich is a saint compared to what went on this year in Puerto Rico. Lia Maivia gets second. Extortion and bribery are a part of this business to be sure, but not an acceptable part. But what went on there when it came to threatening the children of an opposition promoter isn't a part of any business, at least any business that has any business of being called a business. For all you want to say about Vince McMahon, he may be no more honest, or even less honest, in his business dealings than others, but he's no two-bit hood. Jose Gonzales, who may really deserve first, gets third only because all the circumstances surrounding the case indicate that there is more to the story than any of us will ever know. Next to people like this, the idea of Dusty Rhodes ruining the NWA, Jim Crockett letting it happen, or Ed Whalen not showing angles, cutting off violent matches and being an all-around annoying commentator, or Vince McMahon treating his audience like they had the IQ of the rest of his announcing crew is almost palatable.

NEIL NEWMAN: Superstar Graham gets first. I get tired of him calling everybody and everything "Bruthu." Dusty Rhodes' bad points range far and wide. From selfishly putting himself before the promotion to his disgusting fat body. Although I my favorite part of Wrestling Superstars is the Brother Love segment, Bruce Prichard is very obnoxious, however, he is a true success because that is the idea of his gimmick.

TRENT WALTERS: Ed Whalen has to upset the viewer more than anyone else. If cutting off matches because they are violent or bloody wasn't

bad enough, the fact that he wouldn't allow Bruce Hart to book a cage match in Calgary for the past few years for the aforementioned reason, then when Dynamite Kid got the pencil, he allowed him to do one in his second week in.

GREG ANDERSON: That stupid smirk on David Crockett's face seems almost a deliberate attempt to kill any heat a heel might have by intimating we aren't to take anything the heel says seriously. Watching Jim Hellwig blow up on his way to the ring is not my idea of a hot night on the town, and it's made worse because the automatons in the audience eat it up.

JOHN JANCE: Gene Okerlund. What makes him even more annoying is the more ridiculous the situation, the more you see him. The stupidity of his surroundings makes watching him even more unbearable. Vince McMahon gets second, especially for his attempts as crossover humor on the Saturday Nights Main Events. But his playing dumb at the weekly tapings is even worse.

SMM: Dusty Rhodes, David Crockett and Ed Whalen qualify, but they don't bother me that much except when I think about what Dusty has done to the NWA and what Whalen has done for the Stampede television show. I feel Vince McMahon should be first for all the total lying and b.s he says on television. Hulk Hogan makes me cringe and the Ultimate Roider makes it a complete sweep for Titan. What a better place wrestling would be without these three.

GARY ZIMAK: Paul E. Dangerously comes across like nothing more than a loud-mouthed ass. However, somehow I get the feeling that I shouldn't give him any credit for being a good actor.

MARK MADDEN: Virgil Riley Runnels represents everything I hate about pro wrestling--egocentric booking, cronyism (push of J.J. as top manager), self-proclaimed legends; and fat guys who can't wrestle a lick. Pretty soon we can add nepotism to that list.

DAVID LEVIN: Vince McMahon, not only for his on-air work, but his attitude toward treatment of the fans and his McMath of pay-per-view numbers. Just too much to ignore. David Crockett is living proof that Charles Darwin was correct. Dusty Rhodes gets third for letting his huge ego and waistline as well, get in the way of saving the promotion.

DAN CERQUITELLA: David Crockett is still the king. Sometimes I want to throw a brick through my television when I hear comments like, "Look out Dusty," and "Get him, Get him," for the thousandth time in one show.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Ricky Morton. Every time the Rock & Roll popped up, Morton would use that tired, "Rock'n'Roll is here to stay," line that made me want to sell my drum set. Dusty Rhodes the booker gets runner-up for his endless attempts to illicit sympathy for Dusty Rhodes the wrestler.

CHRIS ZAVISA: No contest here. It's Dusty Rhodes by a country mile. Rhodes is simply without peer here. I really thought Hogan's absence would spare him this year but two things changed my mind. That God-awful helmet from the summer and the continued push of him at the expense of Savage.

Vince gets third for his well-established practice of ignoring wrestling history. It's no easier to take now than it was years ago. His renaming of wrestlers and giving them all circus gimmicks is enough to make you puke. Besides, all his big spectacular cards were poor.

STEVE BEVERLY: David Crockett is the basal-cell carcinoma of professional wrestling.

RON LEMIEUX: What Dusty Rhodes did to the NWA gets him the top nod. You know how to kill an effective heel interview? Have David Crockett conduct it.

BEST ON INTERVIEWS

1. JIM CORNETTE (307) 1,696
2. Paul E. Dangerously (30) 659
3. Ric Flair (25) 405
4. Jerry Lawler (6) 261
5. Road Warrior Hawk (4) 139

Honorable Mention: Michael Hayes 131, Ted DiBiase 128, Rick Steiner 83

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 - Lou Albano and Roddy Piper (tied)
1982 - Roddy Piper
1983 - Roddy Piper
1984 - Jimmy Hart
1985 - Jim Cornette
1986 - Jim Cornette
1987 - Jim Cornette

Jim Cornette is not only the best on interviews this year, but he's taken the art of doing a wrestling interview farther than anyone that I've ever seen. There is no competition for first place. Paul E. Dangerously has the nasty routine down better than anyone I've ever seen. It's a tremendous character portrayal of a Louie DePalma without any redeeming social value, but lacking even the little bit of charm the DePalma character had. He's got the potential of being the most truly hated heel in the business. Third I'm going with Road Warrior Hawk, because the guy cracks me up almost every time I watch him, particularly since he went heel. I hate to leave Jerry Lawler out, because his interviews are always good, and his heel ones in Dallas were great. Michael Hayes had some incredible interviews while he was feuding with Buddy Roberts and Terry Gordy, but he's gotten repetitive of late. When he starts a sentence, I always know where it's going and what fun is that? Ric Flair is the same way. Great delivery, great intensity, but lots of overused cliches. Still, when Flair or Hayes do have something new to say, they are as good as they come.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Jim Cornette is so gifted that you might as well eliminate him from the category. The week after Dangerously clubbed him with the phone had to be the greatest interview of his career and one of the best interviews I've ever seen.

BRIAN DALEY: I don't think Ted DiBiase gets the credit here that he does for his ring work. He's so smooth you wouldn't notice sometimes. His voice is good for a heel, he makes sense, he

has a solid vocabulary and is funny without appearing to be trying to be funny.

NEIL NEWMAN: Jim Cornette's recent spots have been stunning in their ingenuity. It is much easier for a heel interview, but Cornette has reached a new level for a baby face. Dangerously's interviews are so intense that his voice cracks, making them funnier than their intent. He's so convincing that it appears he'll have a heart attack if his men don't destroy their opponents. Hulk Hogan is one of the few Titan wrestlers who doesn't need a cue card or a time limit. His ability to ad lib for extended periods is unreal, considering his intensity level is so great.

KLON: Cornette and Dangerously get one-two. Anyone who missed Scotty the Body on the Florida show missed out on a star being born. He's a cross between Michael Hayes and Eddie Haskell. He'll be a contender for No. 1 if he gets to a major group.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Jim Cornette doesn't win for saying that J.J. Dillon was so old he used to wear wool tights. He didn't win for saying Gary Hart's next job would be replacing Grandpa Munster on Super Scary Saturday. He won it when he silenced the fans at the TBS studio simply by raising his hand.

JOHN JANCE: Jerry Lawler has always been a good talker, but showed more versatility in doing both heel and face interviews in the long overdue role as the old-fashioned wrestling champion. He's great in either role, though I prefer his humble and honest Memphis approach.

TERESA DEMARIE: Dangerously takes the prize here as I'm tired of Cornette who does the same type of interview every time out. Cornette depends on his one-liners, but that's getting old now. Dangerously has the better delivery of the two.

JEFF BOWDREN: Who is going to get second place? That's the only question as Cornette is so far ahead of everyone else that we shouldn't even consider anyone else. Lawler gets second as he's turned it on with hot heel spots in Texas. Gilbert gets third as he was fantastic as the New King of Memphis.

GARY ZIMAK: While Michael Hayes and Ric Flair have both given some great interviews this year, nobody can come close to Cornette as far as creativity and delivery goes. It appears that, provided he doesn't go overboard on the baby face stuff, he'll continue to be a shoo-in for the top spot for as long as he's around.

MARK MADDEN: Cornette is currently unmatched -- the best ever. I never saw someone go from hardcore heel to adored face in one interview. His interview after the Dangerously attack was one of the best interviews ever and his one-liners and unmatched, like when he said, "Ben Johnson said, "Hey, man, I didn't take no stereotypes," and meanwhile Florence-Griffith Joyner needs a shave worse than Bruce Willis."

DAN CERQUITELLA: Jim Cornette is so far and away the best that I couldn't even picture him not walking away with No. 1 for as long as he's in wrestling, or at least not in the WWF. Ric Flair's personality comes across so natural that he's a joy to watch.

CHRIS ZAVISA: This was Jim Cornette's year. He went from being the best manager around to being the best manager of all-time. It was his continued excellence on the mike that did it. I marvel at all the new stuff he comes up with week-after-week on TBS. His most recent efforts with the bloody sportscast, threatening to jam it up Dangerously's largest bodily orifice, was a classic. I wish Dusty would have allowed him to take some credit for breaking up the Horseman, but I guess that one was too sensitive for acknowledgement. Most managers lost all their effectiveness when they become faces, but Cornette looks better than ever. I still only tape two guys consistently, Cornette and Ric Flair. Yes, I agree with many who claim he's sometimes stale and his interviews are predictable and repetitive. But, when you have to talk about the same three people for a year, it puts the must of us in pretty confining restrictions. Flair came up with some good interviews this year and still merits watching and listening to.

PAUL HANLIN: When Paul E. Dangerously said, "We'll do like everyone else does, we'll come back as the Midnight Rider," all competition in this category ceased.

MOST CHARISMATIC

1. STING (99)	995
2. Hulk Hogan (101)	887
3. Akira Maeda (111)	732
4. Ric Flair (51)	492
5. Chigusa Nagayo (67)	426

Honorable Mention: Anabolic Warrior 288, Randy Savage 240, Road Warriors 92, Jim Duggan 71, Rick Steiner 66

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Ric Flair
- 1981 - Michael Hayes
- 1982 - Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair (tied)
- 1983 - Ric Flair
- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Hulk Hogan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan
- 1987 - Hulk Hogan

Akira Maeda has to win this in my book. He's taken a country by storm and built a promotion from the ground. This was his year, and while he has great ability, it is his charisma and aura built out of his so-called "shooter" reputation (which I admit is not a good thing for the business, but it's no worse than fake muscles and fake strength moves) that has made him the man in wrestling. I'm going to pick Sting second for his ability to get over with very little help. Third is a close one. Hulk Hogan is still the No. 1 wrestler to the fans of the United States. Chigusa Nagayo has a charisma that Hogan can't come close to, but it's with a less diverse group of fans. While the Anabolic Warrior is the guy who is getting over on a major scale with the kids. If I had to pick one, it would be Hogan, simply because I can't justify leaving him out of the top three.

NEIL NEWMAN: While Randy Savage has tremendous charisma, he appears psyched out

when he appears on the same stage or in the same ring as Hulk Hogan. When Savage arrives, fans cheer loudly. When Hogan arrives, they go berserk. When they do an interview together, Hogan carries the show.

GARY ZIMAK: The current status of the UWF is the best indicator of Maeda's charisma. Sting must also be given recognition for his uncanny charisma which appears to be telepathically communicated to the fans. His interviews don't make sense, but he somehow gets his point across to a degree that would make most wrestlers green with envy.

MARK MADDEN: Hulk Hogan is the most loved pro wrestler in the world and gets first. Ric Flair and the Road Warriors aren't far behind even though they aren't supposed to be. Now, that's charisma.

ERNIE SANTILLI: So many fans wanted to believe this guy was a superb wrestler despite all his technical weaknesses and in spite of his limited push, so I think the obvious choice here is Sting. Ric Flair finishes second for being so popular he can't get anyone to really hate him. "Hasbeen" Jim Duggan takes third for garnering such a strong following without doing one single thing to warrant it.

JOHN JANCE: Nobody ever did as little to earn as much support as the Anabolic Warrior. The crowd gets into his two minute matches and would probably blow up along with their hero if they really knew what was going on.

CHRIS ZAVISA: If the Chigusa Nagayo reception were ever heard in a U.S. arena, it would dwarf anything ever given to Hulk Hogan. I really cannot imagine an arena full of screamers, half dressed up like their idol. Hulk Hogan is still king of the box office in the U.S. While his persona has slipped noticeably of late, he still outdistances all U.S. performers. Sting was very hot for six months. Hopefully the new management will find a way to rekindle that spark in 1989.

BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER

1. TATSUMI FUJINAMI (159)	1,074
2. Owen Hart (120)	885
3. Hiroshi Hase (49)	578
4. Akira Maeda (31)	296
Nobuhiko Takada (29)	296

Honorable Mention: Ted DiBiase 267, Ric Flair 199, Barry Windham 136, Keiichi Yamada 121, Bret Hart 69

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bob Backlund
- 1981 - Ted DiBiase
- 1982 - Satoru Sayama
- 1983 - Satoru Sayama
- 1984 - Dynamite Kid and Masa Saito (tied)
- 1985 - Tatsumi Fujinami
- 1986 - Tatsumi Fujinami
- 1987 - Nobuhiko Takada

I was all set to give this one to Hiroshi Hase, as he put nothing but high-class technical moves into a pro wrestling style better than any wrestler I've seen in a long time. But with Hase on the sidelines for much of the year, I'm going to pick him third. For his

work all year long, Tatsumi Fujinami gets first. Owen Hart gets second based on his stints in Japan and Calgary. While acknowledging weaknesses in his style due to lack of experience, nobody performs each and every maneuver with perfect precision like Hart. His matches are almost a textbook example of perfect execution of difficult moves and high spots. Fujinami's slight edge is he puts it together just as well but is the best in wrestling at realistic selling, both of power moves, actual wrestling moves, and brawling.

GARY ZIMAK: While I rank Fujinami No. 1 based on overall ring performance, I have never seen a wrestler incorporate so many basic amateur moves into a style as exciting as that of Hiroshi Hase.

MARK MADDEN: Since you have to be a great technical wrestler to not look foolish in a UWF match, I see no other choices for the top spots except Takada and Maeda. Even though Hase was injured most of the year, he showed enough when he was active to easily take third.

SKEEVE: I don't think Tiger Mask is a great worker in the sense that he doesn't work to even half his potential most of the time, however he gets high marks because he's one of the few who can work fluently to either the left or to the right.

SEAN RYAN: Hiroshi Hase does moves that other wrestlers couldn't do in their sleep. It's amazing that American amateur greats haven't been able to adapt this well.

JEFF BOWDREN: In Japan, just about everyone from the UWF deserves consideration from Maeda, Takada and Yamazaki all the way down to the jobbers. But Tatsumi Fujinami gets first. He works such a brilliant tactical match that he makes you proud to be a wrestling fan.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Akira Maeda's UWF style of martial arts techniques combined with traditional pro wrestling moves are so well executed that sometimes it's difficult to believe the matches are works. Runner-up is Owen Hart. He deserves a lot of credit for exposing Western audiences to Japanese-style maneuvers.

CHRIS ZAVISA: After watching Tatsumi Fujinami maintain his excellence for the past seven years, it was a pleasure to see him at his all-time best this year. He's simply flawless. He wrestles match-after-match against bigger and slower opponents and carries them to good matches. His efforts against Vader were comparable to the level that Ric Flair alone claimed from 1981-87. Tiger Mask has come a long way from a flashy high-flier, molding himself into an excellent all-around wrestler. Shiro Koshinaka is one of the most deceptiver wrestlers in the business. His style seems far more conservative than Keiichi Yamada or Hiroshi Hase, but he executes every move with precision. He throws in the flashy high spots as well.

STEVE BEVERLY: Owen Hart, but not the Blue Blazer

BEST BRAWLER

1. BRUISER BRODY (209) 1,519
2. Barry Windham (45) 462
3. Terry Gordy (36) 312
4. Ted DiBiase (35) 311
5. Jerry Lawler (18) 299

Honorable Mention: Stan Hansen 271, Eddie Gilbert 240, Ashura Hara 198, Genichiro Tenryu 131, Steve Williams 95, Bobby Eaton 81, Road Warrior Hawk 66

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bruiser Brody
- 1981 - Bruiser Brody
- 1982 - Bruiser Brody
- 1983 - Bruiser Brody
- 1984 - Bruiser Brody
- 1985 - Stan Hansen
- 1986 - Terry Gordy
- 1987 - Bruiser Brody

I've decided that Barry Windham has been in the most consistently top-notch brawls that I've seen this year, and the reason is his pacing is perfect for brawls, his offense is realistic, he's got the size for believability, and his selling is as good as anyone's. Terry Gordy, at his best, is the No. 1 guy, but I haven't seen him at his best nearly as consistently as Windham. Ted DiBiase gets second, mainly for the selling, while Genichiro Tenryu beats out Arn Anderson and Gordy for third with the edge coming because his matches are so stiff they hurt to watch in comparison with Anderson, and he had so many more great brawls than Gordy. Even though Bruiser Brody was active for half the year and is the all-time legend in this category, I just didn't feel I could fairly unless I picked him first, and since everybody else did anyway, I wanted to give credit to others.

REX REED: As far as I'm concerned, this is a Tennessee category, but Murdoch fits in when he's on. Nobody brawls like Jerry Lawler. Bobby Eaton and Dick Murdoch are the best in the business at working, not shooting, with furniture.

BOB CLOSSON: The best brawler in wrestling is no longer with us. Out of respect for him, I choose to ignore all other contenders for this award.

JOHN JANCE: Although his life tragically ended in mid-July, he did more in his last six months than all the others did for the entire year. Besides, this is the last time we can honor him with this award and it would be disrespectful to even try to name a second or third place finisher.

TERESA DEMARIE: Ted DiBiase gets the nod here. He sells better than anyone and could make my grandmother look like Mike Tyson. Brody is as good as they come even if he was only around for half the year. Steve Williams can be awesome when he has a mind to, but I wonder if he has a mind at all.

ROLAND MESSIER: The recipient of the Bruiser Brody Award goes to the man that inspired the award. Brody was the true epitome of a brawling style pro wrestler, though he could also wrestle. Brody's style was a mixture of outside the ring uncontrollable brawling with chairs and lots of pummeling moves like forearms and knee blows. He

also sold well when involved in brawls, sometimes even more than he had to.

GARY ZIMAK: After watching a match with Tenryu & Hara, I'm sore all over. It totally amazes me that their opponents don't have more injuries, considering the stiff style they employ. the good thing about their technique is that when you hit people as hard as they do, it generally looks quite realistic.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Bruiser Brody did more in the first half of the year than anyone else did in the entire year.

BEST FLYING WRESTLER

1. OWEN HART (236) 1,544
2. Tiger Mask (64) 800
3. Bobby Eaton (46) 696
4. Atlantis (63) 534
5. Keiichi Yamada (37) 348

Honorable Mention: Super Black Ninja 96, Mando Guerrero 63

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Jimmy Snuka
- 1982 - Satoru Sayama
- 1983 - Satoru Sayama
- 1984 - Dynamite Kid
- 1985 - Tiger Mask
- 1986 - Tiger Mask
- 1987 - Owen Hart

Atlantis did the most amazing things I've ever seen, but how can you figure out that style? I've got to pick Owen Hart first because his flying was done within the framework of excellent matches and they were moves that for the most part, were flashy and spectacular reversals and escapes to go along with flashy offensive moves. Tiger Mask gets second. His moves were more suicidal, but none of them came from left field like Hart's best ones do. They are great flying moves, but they developed slowly. Since I want to recognize Atlantis, I'll give him third.

SMM: The Mexican guys are almost suicidal, like Atlantis, Eddie Guerrero and Lizmark doing unbelievable leaps off the top rope to the floor. Tiger Mask has been doing the flip off the apron onto the guy outside. Owen Hart and Keiichi Yamada also get high marks here.

SKEEVE: Atlantis is poetry in motion. This is purely a South of the Border category. True, Owen Hart and Keiichi Yamada are great, but nobody does the spectacular flying finishes as the baby faces in Mexico.

JOHN JANCE: Tiger Mask gets it for consistency. Nobody else employs the flying tactics as much to be considered competition, although I'll pick the Blue Blazer second.

TERESA DEMARIE: Owen Hart is incredible, and so is Tiger Mask and Bobby Eaton, although Eaton lacks the grace of the other two.

GARY ZIMAK: Tiger Mask is still the most consistent high flier in the business. the Mexicans may perform flying moves that are

more risky, but when you talk about the wrestler that executes these maneuvers with the most accuracy on an overall basis, Tiger Mask has to get the No. 1 spot.

MARK MADDEN: For simply flying moves, I'd have to go with Tiger Mask or one of the Mexicans, but for realistic flying moves within the context of a pro wrestling match, Owen Hart, Keiichi Yamada and Bobby Eaton are the tops. You can almost feel the pain whey they crash down on someone. Hart can do it all, Yamada has the shooting star and Eaton has the rocket launcher and the vegomatic. They fly like wrestlers, not like acrobats.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Tiger Mask doesn't get the recognition because he's not pushed, but nobody can touch him. Bobby Eaton beats out Owen Hart for second because he doesn't come across like a glorified gymnast.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Tiger Mask is the most exciting wrestler in the business. He edges out Owen Hart for his willingness to perform the more suicidal techniques.

STEVE SIMS: I'm picking Keiichi Yamada first. Hiroshi Hase gets second as he looks like a flying wrestler trying to hurt people as opposed to pure gymnastics. I'd put Atlantis higher than third, but the broad comedy style he works in I just can't buy.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Atlantis is probably the best flyer in the world. The man throws his body around with complete disregard for his own well-being. However, Owen Hart uses flying moves better within the confines of a match and seems to have purpose when he does the flying moves. Vince McMahon has put the handcuffs on him recently, which has eliminated many of his more spectacular moves, but even so, he ranks with the best of them. Yamada is as good as anyone, especially with his shooting star press. However, there were many matches where he stayed on the ground.

JOHN CORRIGAN: I'd love to see more exposure for all the Mexican wrestlers. Atlantis is the best. I've only seen him once and was impressed enough to pick him first.

MOST OVERRATED

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. DUSTY RHODES (141) | 1,065 |
| 2. Anabolic Warrior (88) | 806 |
| 3. Hulk Hogan (57) | 548 |
| 4. Nikita Koloff (10) | 194 |
| 5. Dino Bravo (26) | 161 |

Honorable Mention: Lex Luger 157, Andre the Giant 102, Brutus Beefcake 81, Antonio Inoki 71

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Mr. Wrestling II
- 1981 - Pedro Morales
- 1982 - Pedro Morales
- 1983 - Bob Backlund
- 1984 - Big John Studd
- 1985 - Hulk Hogan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan
- 1987 - Dusty Rhodes

Okay, the first spot is easy here. Dusty Rhodes gets it for several reasons, not the least of which is his

push is simply for reasons having nothing to do with sound business practices. Rhodes was a major star in everyone's mind several years ago. But new fans have no idea why a fat old man is portrayed as a major name, and older fans may recognize the name, but they also realize he's past his prime. Rhodes has a core of supporters to be sure, but anyone pushed to that level would, but anyone who is pushed to that level should have the popularity across-the-board to justify the push. The Anabolic Warrior stinks, but he is over big-time. So is Hulk Hogan. Lex Luger doesn't stink, but he is over to at least come close to justifying a good push, although he probably still is over pushed. Antonio Inoki may be referred to as the Japanese Dusty, and the comparisons are similar in that he's ruined the careers of younger wrestlers because he's held them back for so long they can never get out of his shadow (case in point Tatsumi Fujinami, who has been second fiddle so long fans are having a hard time accepting him as top dog). But make no mistake about it, Inoki is very popular. He isn't as popular as he once was. He isn't as popular as Riki Choshu once was. He isn't as popular as Akira Maeda is, but he is over enough to justify a good spot, even if simple logic would tell us New Japan destroyed its future by pacifying Inoki's ego. Still, nobody had to buy them out to save them. Warrior does get second, however. He is the worst-working main eventer I can ever recall and is a living monument of all that is wrong with pro wrestling. Dino Bravo gets third. There is no reason at all for him to be getting a push. Considering his work rate and charisma, he should be a jobber, if anything. When you see guys like Owen Hart, Terry Taylor, Bret Hart, Paul Roma, The Bulldogs, Blanchard & Anderson, etc. either not pushed or being put in tag team spots where they can't draw money or break out of the "pack," and then you see a no-talent, no charisma wrestler in a money spot, it makes you wonder what goes into the decision making.

NEIL NEWMAN: Anytime a wrestler is pushed as a champion, they should have a semblance of stamina and ability. The Diabolic Duncie has neither. It is really a shame when championship matches last only five minutes because the champion will die at the six minute mark.

MIKE WOOD: Anabolic Warrior's popularity scares me even more than Hulk Hogan's. I can't find anything to like about the guy.

SMM: If just a few of the million of Hulk Hogan fans in the world thought he was a great wrestler, then he's overrated, but if just one person were to think the Ultimate Warrior was, he's really overrated.

GARY ZIMAK: What makes Dusty Rhodes stand out among the rest of the overrated wrestlers, besides his stomach, is that he's the person giving himself the big push.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Dusty Rhodes is so overrated that they had to sell the promotion. Ultimate Warrior is second, as he's a no talent freakazoid. Third is Bret Hart. I like him and I know he's very talented, but the matches he's in simply aren't very good.

LARRY LOVELL: I'll go with Dusty Rhodes over Hulk Hogan for first because between the two egomaniacs, Hogan at least has some visual credibility. Robert Fuller is my third choice since he's turned Memphis into a one-man plus cousin and wife show. He manages every heel and interrupts every baby face interview. Even Jim Cornette would become tiresome if he overexposed himself as much as Fuller does.

JOHN JANCE: Dino Bravo is overrated by the promotion, but certainly not by the fans. In this case, the fans are smarter than Vince thinks. No matter what color he dyes his hair, how many flag matches he wins, how much he bench presses and how many former great wrestlers do jobs for him or incoherent interviews he performs, he's a zero.

TERESA DEMARIE: Watching Andre makes me feel like one of those sickies who calls to someone to jump from a building because I literally sit with morbid fascination waiting for the guy to keel over for the final time. Hogan is the best put over gimmick since the pet rock and is about as talented.

JEFF BOWDREN: Bam Bam Bigelow has done nothing to justify his big push or his big reputation, as he's been a stiff in both the WWF and the NWA this year.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: The combined ring time of Ultimate Warrior's two biggest moments (Summer Sham and Survivors Series) was about two minutes. Ability-wise, Hogan is overrated but since he sells tickets, I've omitted him from the category.

MARK MADDEN: Dusty Rhodes, Ultimate Warrior and Nikita Koloff are all examples of frosting mattering more than the cake, but this cake is year-old devil's food cake that has been left out in the Sahara Desert, that's how bad they all stink. The only circumstance where I could imagine Dusty being a good wrestler is if he had to fight Orson Welles for the last Big Mac at McDonald's around closing time. Yeah, I know Orson Welles is dead, but so is Dusty's career.

ALEX MARVEZ: I didn't get to see too much of Paul E. Dangerously, but from what I did see, he is nowhere near as good as smart fans and writers say. His stuff is all rehashed Roddy Piper. The phone gimmick is stupid, also. Anabolic Warrior and Hogan come next because today's fans believe that the larger someone is, the better they wrestle. Owen Hart is also very overrated, but not so much among the regular public and these muscle heads are.

ERNIE SANTILLI: To quote the words of the Grand Wizard, "Dusty Rhodes is the son of a plumber who ought to get flushed." Second is the Ultimate Wart. He blows up quicker than a Ford Pinto that has been rear-ended by a fuel truck. Third is the Warlord, the world's largest portable pharmacy.

CHRIS ZAVISA: If you stopped 100 people on the street and asked them who was the world's best pro wrestler, we all know Hulk Hogan would win in a cakewalk. The glaring difference between public perception and reality is enough to give Hogan this award forever. The Ultimate Warrior has no ability in the ring and his lack of stamina is obscene. The fact he wears a strap gives him second. Dusty Rhodes can do little in the ring, pushes himself without any shame and can no longer work a decent

match. He looks like a five-night-a-week bowler with two refrigerators.

SCOTT WILLIAMS: It never ceases to amaze me how many fans really believe the Ultimate Warrior is a great wrestler.

STEVE YOHE: I know that Ric Flair and Bret Hart are great wrestlers, but not as great as smart fans make them out to be. Flair does the same moves in every match, even against George South and neither one of them give the impression that they have any offensive moves. Fans are overimpressed with guys who sell. I don't want to vote for the Ultimate Warrior because he tries hard and I can see why he gets pushed.

PAUL HANLIN: When I see all the talent that the WWF has and see a stiff like Ron Bass getting a push, as putrid as he is, but still, he only gets third place. In the DWA, only one man is allowed to win the Bunkhouse finals, only one man is allowed to be more over than guys with 20 times more ability and only one man revolved all the major angles around himself. But the Anabolic Warrior makes Dusty Rhodes look like Satoru Sayama.

MOST UNDERRATED

1. TIGER MASK (19)	522
2. Chris Benoit (48)	465
3. Owen Hart (61)	423
4. Brad Armstrong (46)	402
5. Sam Houston (17)	233

Honorable Mention: Keiichi Yamada 210, Bobby Eaton 199, Barry Horowitz 161, Terry Taylor 147, Rick Steiner 119, Biff Wellington 108, Pat Tanaka 102, Toshiaki Kawada 99, Bret Hart 98, Tim Horner 83, Tommy Rogers 78, Brian Pillman 78, Eddie Gilbert 76, Jerry Morrow 72

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Iron Sheik
- 1981 - Buzz Sawyer
- 1982 - Adrian Adonis
- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
- 1984 - Brian Blair
- 1985 - Bobby Eaton
- 1986 - Bobby Eaton
- 1987 - Brad Armstrong

We've got two kinds of underrated here. We've got guys who are good workers who are held back by lack of charisma or inability to do an interview, and we have guys held back because somebody in charge doesn't give them a chance. There are a lot of talented wrestlers in Titan with the ability to make it that are held back, not only in the ring, but in their bookings. Owen Hart comes to mind, but Terry Taylor's continued switching from face to heel while staying in preliminaries and given mainly bad workers and opening matches to show his wares is another example. Bret Hart has everything it takes to be a major name, yet Titan pushes a no-talent like Brutus Beefcake (who is over to be sure, but Hart would be over five times as much with half the push) or Ron Bass or Dino Bravo in singles spots. On the other hand, Chris Benoit is a great worker whose personality on interviews needs to develop more before he can become a major star,

although his size could be a deterrent, but I think he'll make it some day. Dan Kroffatt isn't underrated, it's just that nobody knows who he is. He's more an unknown and under publicized. Tommy Rogers is much better in the ring than a lot of folks give him credit for being. Tony Anthony, among U.S. wrestlers on the smaller promotions, could at least make it as a decent middle-of-the-card guy with a good work rate in a bigger spot. Sam Houston is a great talent who could be pushed, but he doesn't look like a main eventer yet. Too much of a baby face right now. Toshiaki Kawada is excellent, but in 1989, he'll have his chance so his days of being underrated, which he was this past year, are over. First pick is Keiichi Yamada. He could be a cure for New Japan's woes, but they don't realize it. Their biggest problem is they've lost the kids audience, and marketed correctly, because of his size, he could be a hero to kids as he has great charisma and is a super worker. Tiger Mask lacks charisma, but not ability and deserves a bigger push as well. Third, as far as being under-pushed, is Owen Hart, who if put in a feud with a good worker and given the angle and air time to get it over, would be a significant star with Titan, but it appears he'll never get that chance.

GARY ZIMAK: For what he can do in the ring, it is ludicrous for Inoki to use Yamada in the way that he does. He is basically treated as a nobody who appears in meaningless tag team matches. I feel that he has far too much talent to be used in that type of role. My No. 2 and 3 picks, Tiger Mask and Brad Armstrong will probably remain in the top three for as long as they are active in wrestling.

MARK MADDEN: If the NWA wanted to save itself, it could start emphasizing a junior heavyweight division and bring Yamada in. He has the physique to get over, even as a little guy, and he can put on as good a match as Flair and Windham. Of course the NWA will probably pursue a reasonable alternative, like having Dusty gain 50 pounds and carry Dustin around in a pouch as the New Fabulous Kangaroos.

TRENT WALTERS: My first choice is Rip Rogers. Everyone seems to think he's a bad worker, but I think he's pretty good and his matches always get the fans involved and for the most part they are always decent. Second goes to Chris Benoit. He's one of the top 15 workers in the world and nobody seems to recognize it.

BILL KUNKEL: Ron Starr is one of those guys who I never see in a bad match. He works like a Trojan, snaps his moves off nicely and generates amazing heat. He shouldn't have turned.

DAVID LEVIN: Sam Houston is bigger than the Rougeaus, but he's pushed like he's a wimp. Must be McWeight or something.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Bret Hart could be one of the hottest singles baby faces around. A top-notch main-eventer on any circuit. He's got both the talent and the charisma, but Titan insists on holding him back. If he'd go to the NWA, I wouldn't even mind if he brought Neidhart in with him.

JOE LANCELLO: It would be great if some promoter had a New Year's Resolution to give Larry Cameron and Derrick Dukes a push. These guys have the talent and charisma and ability to be top

stars in the 90s. Too bad more people don't know about Johnny Smith. With the bumps he and Chris Benoit took in their feud, I swear they nearly killed one another.

JOHN JANCE: Although he had on occasion traveled to other areas with little reaction or success and was lightly regarded as an incredibly-successful regional presence, by winning the AWA title, Jerry Lawler has received little of the fanfare he deserves. The AWA title is being nearly ignored. But he has conducted himself like the old-fashioned champions of the past, going to different cities, fighting both faces and heels and engaged in a double title feud. I guess I'm saying Lawler is underrated by the fans. Sam Houston has tremendous potential, but he's still too small for the WWF.

TERESA DEMARIE: The very fact he had to submit to an over-the-hill non-draw like Greg Valentine on a national pay-per-view show tells you the No. 1 pick is the Blue Blazer. This is a crime against society. Barry Horowitz is easily the single most-buried talent eking out a living doing jobs for those with 1/10th his ability. He's a good heel who can heat up the crowd.

JEFF BOWDREN: Keiichi Yamada. Don't you love the irony here. He's held back because he's too small. For almost five years, Inoki and Sakaguchi have been searching for someone who can be a hero to the little kids of Japan. The last one was Sayama. Meanwhile, right under their noses they have a guy the right size, with the right charisma who may be the best worker in the world right now. He was born to play the Rocky character. I suppose some would say Owen Hart is underrated because of what has happened with Titan, but he should have realized he wasn't going to fit in so I place some of the blame on him.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Having watched him every week for the past year, there is no doubt in my mind Chris Benoit is the most underrated wrestler in the business. If he was a bit taller, his future would be unlimited.

STEVE SIMS: Why Keiichi Yamada is still wrestling in preliminaries is beyond me. Brad Armstrong is an excellent wrestler who could be top 10 in the world if used correctly. The Foot Loose should be pushed a lot more, also.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Tiger Mask is simply fantastic and should be one of the two or three biggest stars in the world, let alone in his promotion. While he's most certainly a star, he's often relegated to the middle of the card and often isn't on television for weeks at a time. Second is Rick Steiner. His mid-air reversal of a body slam is most impressive. He would have been a great opponent for Blanchard and Anderson. Sam Houston has fallen a bit but WWFitis hasn't set in yet. He's used almost exclusively as a jobber when he could be doing a lot better if he was given a chance. But unless he takes tons of steroids, he'll probably never get that chance.

STEVE YOHE: Andre the Giant is knocked by everyone but he's a great star and a big drawing card, still. The marks believe in him and I enjoy his act. Davey Boy Smith is a great talent who

is wasted. Jim Duggan is liked by the fans but is held back by Titan.

RON LEMIEUX: The NWA has numerous chances to push Brad Armstrong but they never took advantage of them. Sam Houston's day will come soon, but not with the WWF.

BEST PROMOTION

1. NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING (99) . . . 1,216
2. Universal Wrestling Federation (197) . . . 1,194
3. World Wrestling Federation (109) 845
4. All Japan Pro Wrestling (36) 693
5. National Wrestling Alliance (37) 435

Honorable Mention: Continental Wrestling Federation 181, Championship Wrestling Association 180, All Japan Women's Wrestling Association 161, Stampede Wrestling 150

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1983 - Jim Crockett Promotions
1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
1985 - All Japan Pro Wrestling
1986 - Universal Wrestling Federation (U.S.)
1987 - New Japan Pro Wrestling

I've got a point to make here since I was going to originally pick the WWF third in this category, and now I'm not going to pick them in the top three. Yes, the WWF is the best run organization in wrestling. I wish every wrestling promotion was run as well and as efficiently. The WWF produces an excellent television program. Yes, they are excellent at drawing fans and make more money than anyone else. As strictly a business venture, the WWF would get second. However, when you are judging the quality of a promotion, while a promotion that isn't "making it" should be disqualified from being the best, because this is a business we are talking about, if a promotion is successful, we should look at the product they produce. The product is wrestling and the WWF falls short. The National Enquirer probably makes more money than most any newspaper, but it would be quite dangerous to say it is the best newspaper in the United States. Ditto for movies, television shows, the music business or anything else having to do with public taste. Yes, the bottom line is profit, but if you don't have enough respect for your consumers to attempt to compete for product quality, you don't deserve any awards for having a well-run organization. In my first job with a newspaper, me and another person were getting our first day initiation by the editor of the paper and he asked what was the most important priority of the newspaper. I said, it was making money and the other person said it was putting out the best newspaper possible. The editor said we were both right and we were both wrong. Making a profit was important, but if that's your only concern, then it wouldn't be much of a newspaper, would it be? If you aren't concerned about your public and you aren't attempting to give the public your best product, you are cheating the public. But, if you run the greatest newspaper in the world, and it doesn't make a profit, someday it'll catch up and the plug will be pulled. Anyway, Titan doesn't have the concern for their public (if they did, they wouldn't book five shows on weekends which cheats the fans in most cities because the wrestlers are an automatic pilot rather than enthusiastic about working) or their wrestlers (yes, they pay better than anyone but they

also can afford to do so, if they had concern, the guys would have a more sane travel schedule and they wouldn't be pushed based on the amount of steroids they can take without medical problems). Titan doesn't strive to give its potentially best product. They could easily market wrestlers in the manner they do, create angles to draw money, and still do it with guys who can deliver action. Titan reminds me of the radio station which puts on obnoxious talk show hosts to create hostilities because their sole concern is ratings rather than attempt to compete for ratings with an intelligent host. Now that I've finished that speech, the top spot in any criteria this year is the UWF anyway. It's all been said before. Starting a promotion from scratch and without television and with a style that has never proven successful sounds like suicide, not a recipe for the hottest promotion around. Everyone said they were a flash in the pan, and I even said they'd never make it. But they are just as hot as ever right now. They booked for the good of the company's future, not for ego. They could have gotten greedy and promoted more than once a month, but they didn't. If they've made any mistakes, they are a better kept secret than the reason for Bruiser Brody being killed. Second is New Japan, based on having the best matches for the first eight months of the year. Things have slowed down since then, but they haven't collapsed (like the NWA did financially) even though they've had behind-the-scenes problems. Third is All Japan. Good matches. Good business sense. Nothing spectacular this year. The WWF runs the most profitable business and deserves credit for that, but an average house show lacks heat or enthusiasm by the wrestlers. They basically are the National Enquirer, or the Official WWF Magazine, of wrestling promotions. I believe they are proud to wear that label. I'm not saying they should change the style of wrestling to something more hardcore or violent, but they should insist of effort at house shows and put their wrestlers on schedules that make decent efforts each night possible. Besides, Inoki had enough class to publicly acknowledge what happened to Brody and Adonis, even though Brody was his arch-enemy in business, and Baba was honest enough to call a press conference when Ashura Hara was fired and not to pretend he never existed in the first place or falsely advertise him even though it couldn't have helped the gate.

REX REED: Too many of the money-makers have terrible products, while the good products haven't made much money.

SMM: All Japan in every sense of the word. For years they've rolled along smoothly, not even major moves like Choshu's jump hurt them all that bad, while New Japan has always been loaded with behind-the-scenes turmoil. So far, the UWF hasn't done anything wrong, and gets second. I'll go with New Japan third.

SCOTT HUDSON: The UWF is exactly what pro wrestling should be. No cartoon gimmicks, no weekly television and a great product. Second goes to the WWF. I realize it is the exact opposite of what makes the UWF so great, but I enjoy it as well. Third goes to New Japan, which is the best of a happy medium between the two.

SEAN RYAN: New Japan gets first. They would get first by a mile if they didn't de-emphasize their best lighter weight wrestlers. Didn't wrestling die in England because they put too much emphasis on the heavyweights?

GARY ZIMAK: McMahon may have things locked up in this country, but the Japanese promotions still blow him away.

MARK MADDEN: The bottom line of making money and nobody makes more money than Vince McMahon. Titan may not keep hardcore fans happy, but who really does right now besides New Japan?

BILL KUNKEL: Titan Sports. Is there another promotion run even half as intelligently, with decisions based not on anyone's ego but on who they think will give fans the best show?

DAVID LEVIN: The UWF would be first even if they ran nightly cards and drew less. As it is, they are the only wrestlers who have the belief factor going for them.

STEVE SIMS: I'm sure a lot of people will vote for the UWF, but their shows are too short and too infrequent for me. The margin between New Japan, All Japan and WWF is razor-thin. WWF is the best in all respects except in their in-ring product and who they push.

BOB CLOSSON: Outside of the UWF, this hasn't been the best of years for good promotions. The Japanese at least seem more consistent. In the States, World Class is my favorite right now followed by Stampede.

JEFF BOWDREN: This is a tough choice as almost every promotion has pulled some bonehead maneuver this year. The AWA doesn't even run a regular schedule and has a television show written right before the taping since they never know who will show up. The NWA had a booker more determined than ever to push himself no matter what the public wanted. They had a promoter who killed off their home base, which had traditionally been one of the strongest wrestling areas in the country by ripping fans off with screw job finishes and stale angles. New Japan changed the main event on the biggest show of the year during the card. New Japan, gifted with the greatest stable of wrestlers in the world, lost several of them and its prime-time television spot due to the massive ego of Antonio Inoki. All Japan women suffered through declining television ratings and house show gates as they didn't properly prepare for the impact that Dump Matsumoto's retirement would have. Her spot could have been filled by Bull Nakano had Nakano been developed right. Third is the WWF. The wrestling sucks, but you can't argue they have the best production and the largest stable. Second is All Japan, which came up from the ashes and seems to be the only promotion that cares about the fans and respects wrestling's past and its traditions. First is the UWF.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Based on both success at the gate and quality of matches, I'm picking UWF, All Japan and New Japan. While you can't overlook the success at the gate of the WWF, running only a handful of quality cards in the course of a year causes them to miss the top three.

ROLAND MESSIER: I think you should have two different categories, best or most successful promotion and the readers favorite promotion. If I were to follow the Wrestling Observer criteria, WWF would get it, however Titan doesn't produce consistently good, or even consistently mediocre live cards and doesn't produce quality in-ring action. New Japan gets my first pick based on gate, work rate and good television shows and excellent live shows. Japanese women are second. I just never get tired of watching New Japan or Japanese women tapes. Even their preliminary matches are better than the majority of U.S. main events. UWF gets my third pick based on its success and unique and demanding style.

CHRIS ZAVISA: I can't vote for Titan since the most important factor, the wrestling, is some of the worst in the world. I really don't care about their financial or public relations success. The best wrestling in the world comes from New Japan. They have the best of the young athletes, have great matches and put on excellent big shows. They fell down this year but I still look forward to seeing their tapes more than any other promotion. Even the Inoki/Fujinami split hasn't hurt the work rate of anyone. Second is UWF. You have to hand it to Maeda. The man gets himself fired for a cowardly kick on a national star, joins with two other stars to form a promotion, only operates on a part-time basis and then becomes the hottest promotion in the world. What I have seen certainly doesn't justify his success. Third goes to All Japan. At the start of the year they were a tired and aging promotion who held their audiences mainly through long-established loyalty. In the last six months, they improved greatly

MICHELLE JOHNSON: The WWF matches may not be all that great, but the fact that they can get away with it says something.

PAUL HANLIN: The UWF, against all odds, have succeeded beyond anyone's wildest dreams. They have the best wrestling. No screw jobs. No DQ's. No referee bumps. Just wrestling the way it should be.

RON LEMIEUX: No promotion really shined this year, but as a money-making venture, the WWF did real well.

BEST TELEVISION SHOW

1. NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING (176) 1,064
2. WWF Superstars of Wrestling (77) . . . 564
3. Continental Wrestling Federation (49) . . 520
4. All Japan Pro Wrestling (1) 456
5. CWA 90 minute Memphis show (33) . . 453

Honorable Mention: TBS World Championship Wrestling 354, Stampede Wrestling 180, WWF Prime Time Wrestling 181, Exciting Women's Wrestling 98, WWF Wrestling Challenge 78

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
1985 - Mid South Wrestling
1986 - UWF Wrestling (U.S.)
1987 - CWA 90 minute Memphis show

New Japan gets first simply based on the quality of matches, particularly in the first eight months of the year. WWF Superstars of Wrestling is a great wrestling television show, in that it gets the personalities of the wrestlers over. The matches aren't good, but they are short enough to where they don't become tedious, either. I don't like Vince McMahon's talking down to his audience, but his interplay with Jesse Ventura is usually very good. The production values can't be beat. On the other hand, even though Bobby Heenan and Gorilla Monsoon have a decent act on Prime Time Wrestling, the matches are the dominant feature of the show and they are the pits, for the most part. The TBS show has great interviews, but it has potential to be so much better, and I do expect it will be before 1989 is completed. Anyway, I'm picking the WWF Superstars show second based simply on the fact they know what they want to get across, and they get it across, and it is generally entertaining. I'm picking All Japan third, although right now I'd go with the TBS show because of how good the pre-Starcade interviews were. But based on the whole year, I can't begin to tell you how many times I fell asleep watching the TBS show.

SMM: New Japan has the best, from the camera work, to the usage of music, and quality of the matches. All Japan may be a little bland, but I love the way the wrestling is presented with no commercials during the matches. Memphis is off a bit but I still enjoy watching the show.

GARY ZIMAK: Despite what anyone may say to the contrary, Memphis still makes a big deal out of nothing better than any other U.S. television show. I agree their quality has decreased over the past year or two, but how much talent do they have to work with? Take a look at the other low-budget shows (Savoldi's ICW, Deep South, IWA) and see how much fun they are to watch.

MARK MADDEN: I saw virtually every CWF show with Eddie Gilbert as the booker and you couldn't beat it for a combination of pacing, angles and matches. It definitely had the soap-opera similarity, with one week making you anticipate the next.

STEVE SIMS: The WWF is one amazing production. Their Superstars show is slicker and delivers more than a lot of prime-time shows. NWA TBS still gets second. Sometimes it's boring, but one can always tune in and see what the current state of the promotion is. Memphis is solid and reliable and I appreciate they still do it live.

CHRIS ZAVISA: The one show that I must watch, even if it is on a four-to-six week delay, is New Japan. They have the best wrestling in the world. They show us only main event matches from major cards. It's all action with no interviews to slow it down. Just imagine watching a WTBS type show and ask yourself how many people would be willing to buy tapes of it? All Japan shows have improved greatly over the last six months. For four months, the NWA Main Event was the best U.S. wrestling show. Now it is just like all the rest. They do deserve some credit for trying.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: While Stampede wrestling may lack the glamour of other shows, week in and week out the show usually provides a few good matches. The CWF under Gilbert used the combined

styles of Memphis and Mid South. You never knew what was going to happen next. Even if you did, they still found a way to surprise you. I picked it second only because it wasn't done that way for the entire year. Despite some decline, I still enjoy watching the CWA show from Memphis.

ROLAND MESSIER: CWA may not have the best crop of talent in wrestling, but they know how to use the talent properly. They could have Randy Hales vs. Michael St. John wrestling each other and it would still be interesting. I'm basing this on creativity and what the promotion does with its resources. It seems the best all-around angles and interviews come from the CWA show. They have the best local promotions. Lance Russell and Dave Brown intermingle perfectly with the wrestling personalities. What I like about CWA and Portland Wrestling is they continue to uphold the style and characteristics of good small-time local promotions.

JON KARESH: It's a pretty sad commentary when a small promotion with little genuine talent had a better television show than all the big-time promotions. At least for a short time, that was the case with the CWF.

STEVE GENERALLI: The WWF show sunk to new depths with a poor product and unbearable studio announcing. The NWA, before the buy out, was not worth watching with few exceptions like Flair and Cornette. Among the other promotions, Eddie Gilbert's CWF was the only one deserving of any merit.

MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. RIC FLAIR VS. STING 3/27	
GREENSBORO (120)	907
2. Midnight vs. Fantastics 3/27	
Greensboro (46)	510
3. Midnight vs. Fantastics 4/26	
Chattanooga (53)	486
4. Foot Loose vs. Takano & Nakano 7/19	
Tokyo (22)	177
5. Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage 4/25	
MSG (12)	151

Honorable Mention: Chigusa Nagayo vs. Lioness Asuka 8/25 Kawasaki 147, Antonio Inoki vs. Tatsumi Fujinami 8/8 Yokohama 146, Tatsumi Fujinami vs. Riki Choshu 6/24 Osaka 120, Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara vs. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu 8/30 Osaka 117, Midnight Express vs. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson 8/26 Greensboro 110, Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage 7/22 MSG cage match 108, Owen Hart vs. Hiroshi Hase 5/27 Sendai 99, Hiroshi Hase vs. Shiro Koshinaka 3/19 Tokyo 85, Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Tiger Mask 3/9 Yokohama 76, Owen Hart vs. Keiichi Yamada 6/10 Hiroshima 72, Akira Maeda vs. Kazuo Yamazaki 5/12 Tokyo 63, Owen Hart vs. Shiro Koshinaka 6/24 Osaka 63, Kazuo Yamazaki vs. Nobuhiko Takada 8/13 Tokyo 62

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bob Backlund vs. Ken Patera in Madison Square Garden
- 1981 - Pat Patterson vs. Sgt. Slaughter in Madison Square Garden
- 1982 - Satoru Sayama vs. Dynamite Kid 8-25 Tokyo
- 1983 - Ric Flair vs. Harley Race 11-24 Greensboro
- 1984 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs 7-4 Fort Worth
- 1985 - Tiger Mask vs. Kuniaki Kobayashi 6-12 Tokyo
- 1986 - Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham 2-14 Orlando
- 1987 - Ricky Steamboat vs. Randy Savage 3-29 Pontiac

If I had to pick three, they would be The Fantastics vs. Midnight Express from Chattanooga as the first pick, second would be The Foot Loose vs. Shunji Takano & Shinichi Nakano on 7/19 simply for heat and incredible moves and third I'd pick Ric Flair vs. Sting from the first Clash of the Champions simply because the match provided everything and I was so emotionally "up" when it was over and every time I watched it afterward that it actually made it hard to sleep afterwards (of course, then I plugged in your average TBS show and that was better than a box of sleeping pills). I really wanted to get Tiger Mask vs. Jumbo Tsuruta on 3/9 into the top three because it was an outstanding match as well, as were many of them but Midnight vs. Fantastics from the first Clash was memorable as was the match where Barry Windham turned heel. The best WWF match I saw was the DiBiase vs. Savage match from the Saturday Night Main Event in Nashville.

SMM: Match of the year should have that certain aura and feeling and heat about it. Hase vs. Kobayashi on 12/27 had that and I'll go with it. Midnight vs. Fantastics from the first clash was just great.

GARY ZIMAK: The Flair-Sting match had all the elements of a classic wrestling match. Even though Flair has gotten quite stale in most of his matches, he was fresh for this one. Even the completely idiotic ending won't stop me from choosing this match number 1. After all, this is the NWA that we're talking about.

MARK MADDEN: Besides being the best match of the year, the Flair-Sting match at Clash I gave fans a chance to view the champ as he once was, or more accurately, how he once was allowed to be and hopefully he'll be that way again. It gave us a chance to see Sting take a major step up the ladder.

SKEEVE: I have never seen anyone work an injury as well as Fujinami did with his knee in the 5/27 match with Choshu. From the beginning to the end of the match, the heat between the two and within the crowd was incredible. When Fujinami first collapsed after rebounding off the ropes, I wondered if it was a work or if his knee really went out.

TERESA DEMARIE: I prefer the American wrestling and No. 1 pick was a really fine cage match, even without blood with Savage vs. DiBiase. You couldn't have asked for a harder worked match considering the confines of the cage.

JEFF BOWDREN: I must mention one particular match. Don Nakaya Neilsen has to be the best ever at working a mixed match. His match with Maeda a

few years back was legendary. A match he did earlier this year with Yamada was quite good. But his match with Fujiwara this year may have been the most realistic worked match I've ever seen. It was just brutal.

BILL KUNKEL: Savage vs. DiBiase cage match from Madison Square Garden had it all, including a fan who scaled the cage at a crucial moment and almost screwed up the ending.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Ric Flair vs. Sting from the first Clash of the Champions. Nothing could compare to the intensity of this match. For work rate, showmanship and effort, this one had it.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Midnight Express vs. Fantastics from the first Clash of the Champions. If this was televised on PBS and they interrupted the match for a telethon pitch, I would have wired my pledge to the Crocketts immediately. Of course, later I would have paid them 40 cents on the dollar.

PAUL HANLIN: Midnight Express vs. Fantastics from Chattanooga was as good as it gets. 40 Minutes of non-stop action and one of the wildest finishes I've ever seen. This was their best match. The Inoki vs. Fujinami match on 8/8 was more than a match. Ric Flair vs. Sting from Clash of the Champions was ruined by that horrific non-decision.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

- 1. GARY ALLBRIGHT (46) 330
- 2. Todd Morton (22) 318
- 3. Ricky Rice (33) 292
- 4. Kenta Kobashi (36) 270
- 5. Scott Steiner (34) 264

Honorable Mention: Cactus Jack Foley 216, Derrick Dukes 131, Scotty The Body 121, Shigeo Miyato 62

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Barry Windham
- 1981 - Brad Rheingans and Brad Armstrong (tied)
- 1982 - Steve Williams
- 1983 - Road Warriors
- 1984 - Tom Zenk and Keiichi Yamada (tied)
- 1985 - Jack Victory
- 1986 - Bam Bam Bigelow
- 1987 - Brian Pillman

Based on the responses, we probably shouldn't even give an award out this year. We've got slim pickings to be sure. But since somebody is going to win, my picks are Kenta Kobashi first (sure, I haven't seen him but those whose opinions I value have said he is a great rookie, and we sure don't have any great rookies here), Cactus Jack Foley third (nothing spectacular although he bleeds buckets and takes insane bumps) and Scotty the Body second (he works for Florida Championship Wrestling as his interviews are hilarious and his ring work is solid).

MARK MADDEN: Ricky Rice is the best of a bad bunch, but he does have a decent physique and good agility. With experience, he'll be an above-average wrestler.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1. JIM CORNETTE (342) 2,001
2. Paul E. Dangerously (42) 1,022
3. Bobby Heenan (12) 473
4. J.J. Dillon (6) 144
5. Diamond Dallas Page 73

Honorable Mention: Jimmy Hart 60

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1983 - Jimmy Hart
1984 - Jimmy Hart
1985 - Jim Cornette
1986 - Jim Cornette
1987 - Jim Cornette

It's almost not worth commenting on this category since the top three are so obvious. Cornette deserves first not only because he changed roles and was even more effective but for consistency and creativity through the year. Dangerously did excellent work in Continental and carried it through to the NWA, but doesn't have the experience all-around to be competition for first place yet. Heenan has the experience and is also great, even if somewhat over-exposed, but doesn't have anywhere near the hunger of the first two which limits him to a distant third. Nobody else is in the same league with these three, who are actually each in a different league from each other as well.

NEIL NEWMAN: Jim Cornette's ability as an overall manager was displayed when he turned baby face. Managers like Paul Ellering and Lou Albano lost their appeal when they turned good, but Cornette has improved, if that is possible.

BOB CLOSSON: The top two are Cornette and Dangerously, but if there was any doubt as to which was the better of the two, it was put to rest when they went against each other. Dangerously was overshadowed.

LARRY LOVELL: Cornette continues to do an excellent job. Dangerously is a solid second but not really a close second. He's closer when it comes to humor than at working a ringside crowd which Master James does very well. Heenan is my choice for third as he gets a lot of poor wrestlers over and still has a sharp wit.

TERESA DEMARIE: Dangerously easily gets the nod this year. He's doing the best interviews in wrestling right now and works a crowd even better than Cornette. Cornette is still doing the same routine but is in a class above anyone else. Nobody even deserves third.

JEFF BOWDREN: Jim Cornette is pretty much the greatest manager of all-time and should be ineligible for this award. It's really not fair. Dangerously and Heenan stand out above the rest, all of whom are mediocre at best.

SMM: I think a lot of people are going to vote for Paul E. just not to vote for Cornette first, but I think Paul E. deserves first. He's just an awesome heel and gets tons of heat. Cornette gets second and third I'll go with Heenan. He's not what he used to be, but he's still good and he can outwrestle the Ultimate Warrior.

MARK MADDEN: Cornette is the best on interviews, best at ringside and probably the best ever. Nothing makes me enjoy wrestling more than Jim Cornette. The ease with which he negotiated his turn was amazing. Dangerously is the second coming of Cornette, which is the supreme compliment, and he's only going to get better.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Jim Cornette's interviews and ringside antics were the only reason the TBS shows were on my must tape list all year. Kevin Sullivan gets second. He took technically excellent but totally bland personalities and created a hot new gimmick to get them over while reincarnating his own completely lecherous image.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Jim Cornette is without a doubt the greatest wrestling manager of all-time. Nobody in the business today, not Paul Dangerously, not Bobby Heenan, is even in the same time zone. His interviews alone make a fantastic four-hour tape. We all thought Jimmy Hart was hot stuff in Memphis, but even his best interviews and skits pale to next to any Saturday TBS spot with Cornette.

PAUL HANLIN: This is the year of Paul E. Dangerously. While Jim Cornette had the same stale cast to play off all year, Dangerously excelled in AWA, Windy City and CWF.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: Jim Cornette is the best ever and nobody else is even close.

BEST TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

1. JIM ROSS (272) 1,648
2. Lance Russell (88) 998
3. Tony Schiavone 433
4. Vince McMahon (9) 174
5. Gordon Solie (10) 117

Honorable Mention: Gorilla Monsoon 75, Lee Marshall 69, Bob Caudle 68

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 - Gordon Solie
1982 - Gordon Solie
1983 - Gordon Solie
1984 - Lance Russell
1985 - Lance Russell
1986 - Lance Russell
1987 - Lance Russell

It has to be Jim Ross for a wide variety of reasons. He is more prepared than any announcer in the business, can translate wrestling into sports vernacular and can legitimize important matches to make them seem even more intense than they really are. More importantly, he is the one announcer who constantly improved all year long. He used to scream too much and now paces his excitement better. He used to try and get every match over as a classic on pay-per-view cards, but at recent shows, limited it to those which deserved that praise. Actually the main reason he gets my first pick is because his presence and caused a marked improvement in the work of both Tony Schiavone and Bob Caudle this year. Wish I could say the same for David Crockett, but Merlin the Magician couldn't make him a good announcer. I'm picking Schiavone second. He's

always had good announcing skills but he's gotten so much better at getting in-depth with the wrestlers' personalities and match and angle story-lines. I don't like the fact that Vince McMahon talks down to his audience, but I'm picking him third because he does get across what needs to be gotten across and he is entertaining. Lance Russell was the best when Memphis was good, but Memphis hasn't been good of late and I don't think any announcer could look good with nothing but bad matches and sub par talent to work around.

MIKE WOOD: Jim Ross is the best because he always throws in great side comments and points out things that other announcers would miss.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: I don't think anyone can legitimize wrestling more than Jim Ross. He has really toned down the one thing I didn't like about him, which was him trying to make every match into a classic syndrome. Week-to-week he gives the telecasts a terrific new dimension. I got to see Lance Russell steadily for the first time this year and can't see what all the fuss is about. He's a quality announcer, but no Jim Ross. I like Bob Caudle third. This may have a lot to do with Ross because I never remember Caudle being this good with Johnny Weaver.

SEAN RYAN: Jim Ross comes across as so intelligent when it comes to wrestling on the broadcasts that I am shocked the Crocketts even let him on the air. When I heard some of his references, like calling Ivan Koloff a former World champion, mentioning The Funks when Al Perez used the spinning toe hold, I thought for sure he was going to get fired. Lance Russell gets second for his continuing to shine in a most unique style. I was contemplating Vince McMahon for third, as he is Titan's best announcer, but I opted for common sense and chose Dave Brown.

SMM: The most important thing for an announcer to do is get across the points that need to be gotten across. I still have to stick with Lance Russell as the best. He's more than a television announcer, he is Memphis wrestling. If he ever left, it would leave a very big void. Jim Ross is excellent, but I still feel he was more at ease in Mid South. I also enjoy Rick Stuart on Southern while Don Koss, Dave Brown and Charlie Platt are easy to listen to.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Jim Ross truly appreciates good wrestling. He adds a sense of drama and history to angles and can almost make bad angles interesting. The best part about him is he makes his broadcast partners even better, such as Bob Caudle at the third Clash of the Champions. He subtly points out assets of wrestlers that aren't getting the push they might deserve and his commentary can make a bad show worth watching. Tony Schiavone gets second. He improved all year and has a low-key approach that is a pleasure to listen to.

JOHN JANCE: It's not Lance Russell's fault that things are drying up in Memphis. He continues to conduct himself in the most credible and professional manner.

ROLAND MESSIER: Lance Russell and Dave Brown make the CWA show as enjoyable as it is. Russell is the total professional in how he calls a match and in taking the lead in interviews and guiding young wrestlers through. When he's involved

with an angle on television, he plays his role to perfection and is very convincing. His style is both humorous and smooth in that he always knows what to say when a void or gap is to be filled. He's loaded with cliches and funny vocal mannerisms, but doesn't overuse his style to the point where it's sickening.

MARK RUSIKOFF: I like Ed Whalen. He makes it funny and there has to be some humor in wrestling, doesn't there?

JEFF BOWDREN: Three announces really stood out from the crowd this year. Jim Ross is great at calling a match and at explaining an angle to the fans. He doesn't get as excited as he used to, which can be either good or bad. He's a master at commentary and did a great job in the Midnight Express vs. Road Warriors match in which he had to turn both teams at the same time. He did subtle things in that match which were great. It was the kind of stuff Gordon Solie used to do before age set in. Lance Russell is great at bringing young wrestlers through an interview and showing proper disgust at the heels. Finally, we have to give Vince McMahon his due. He is very good in the role he's created for himself.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: I'm taking the coward's way out and putting Russell and Ross in a tie for first. All the praise Ross gets is deserved, but one can't overlook the fact that Russell is the bond that makes the CWA show run so smoothly. Because Lance is so outstanding, Dave Brown's work often gets overlooked. While Brown doesn't stand out like the other two, he is more than capable of doing a good job and being a member of the legitimate media, he adds some credibility to the show.

GARY ZIMAK: The choice between the top two was tough for me, but I'll go with Lance Russell because I feel he is the Memphis television show. No offense to Dave Brown, but the week Lance wasn't there, the show lacked the usual studio mayhem intensity. Jim Ross deserves much credit for the great job that he does with the NWA. He's the best at making any match appear to be more significant than it actually is. Lee Marshall gets my third vote, combining a good knowledge of the sport with an excellent announcing style to produce some very enjoyable commentary.

MARK MADDEN: Lance Russell bores me at times, he's almost too realistic and calls it like he would call a baseball game. Ross, however, adds just the right touch of over exuberance sprinkled with the right blend of opinions, banter and play-by-play.

BILL KUNKEL: Jim Ross calls an excellent technical match and generates great excitement. I honestly think there should be an award for the best broadcast team, since it's the interplay between them that makes the show. Ross shills way too much, however, and that hurts his credibility, but he's still No. 1.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Jim Ross sells moves and match intensity better than a lot of the participants. Lance Russell is second, he's consistent but never condescending. Lee Marshall

does a commendable job in a tough situation, making an AWA match sound exciting.

STEVE SIMS: Jim Ross to me is the best. Bob Caudle is so smooth and professional I don't think people realize how good he is. Vince McMahon always gets his key points across well as an announcer that I think he's better, even as obnoxious as he is, than people give him credit for.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Ross is the best play-by-play man. He does a clean, precise job packed with action phrases which add to a bout's intensity. He has a perfect sense of timing, knowing when to build-up drama or throw-in a lighter touch. His subtle facial expressions during heel interviews are reminiscent of Lance Russell at his peak. Tony Schiavone has come a long way in five years and now is among the best. In fact, working with Ross has made Tony a lot better. Third goes to Russell. While Memphis has been suffering this year from a lack of talent, he still does his best and is always a true professional.

WORST TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

1. DAVID CROCKETT (124)	977
2. Superstar Billy Graham (107)	802
3. Ed Whalen (80)	684
4. Marc Lowrance (29)	281
5. Gorilla Monsoon (15)	207
Rod Tronguard (13)	207

Honorable Mention: Lord Alfred Hayes 195, Larry Nelson 96, Vince McMahon 91

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Angelo Mosca
- 1985 - Gorilla Monsoon
- 1986 - David Crockett
- 1987 - David Crockett

Where do we start? Let's see. Rod Tronguard knows nothing about wrestling and doesn't appear to want to learn, although he is a legitimate real announcer. David Crockett is an embarrassment and there is no excuse for him. Mark Lowrance is horrible and has no credibility. If an announcer doesn't have credibility, the angles of the television show are ruined and World Class will never get any popularity back with a mainstream audience until he's dumped. Billy Graham's job at Summer Slam was the single worst announcing job on any major event, until Superclash III and Leering Larry and Lee Marshall, but that's not included in this year's rating period. David McLane should be lucky I never saw him this year. Actually, I'm the one who is lucky, because he's so obnoxious that I'd rate him right there with murderers and thieves. Al Hayes is Vince's pet joke, and it's always sad to watch because in his day he was a great interview. But an announcer should not ruin the excitement of the show, nor fail to convey excitement when there is some. As bad as Crockett babbles, he can convey excitement. As bad as Lowrance shills, so can he. As little as Tronguard knows, he doesn't ruin a good match by calling it (well, it would be hard in his case, how many good matches does the WWF even have?). First pick is Ed Whalen, who I'm sure is a much better broadcaster than everyone listed here, but he is the worst wrestling announcer of this year. Those of you who hate the way Crockett smirks at heels would hate Whalen worse as he tries to bully the

heels around. David Crockett does get second and Graham gets third.

NEIL NEWMAN: Superstar Graham is paid nice money by Vince to say, "Bruthu." Vince acknowledged Graham's incompetence when co-hosting Prime Time Wrestling. Lord Al Hayes is McMahon's little toy, a guy he pays just to humiliate. Rod Tronguard gets third. Most announcers exaggerate because that's the nature of the business, but when he claimed Wahoo could run the 100 in under 10 seconds, his nose grew larger than Pinocchio's ever did.

MIKE WOOD: Even the totally inept announcers like Rancid Rod, Gordon Senile, Billy Grahampa and ol' DC never intentionally destroyed or ignored key angles, which is one of the announcer's prime purposes for existence. Ed Whalen wins this one.

SMM: The worst announcers don't get points across and actually hurt the show and getting the angles over. Vince McMahon is a master at getting points across, but he used to be an excellent announcer, but now he's not selling wrestling and I can't stand to listen to him. He acts like he's got no knowledge of what's going on when he calls the shots. Mark Lowrance is a master of not getting points across. Percy Pringle said it best once when he said, "Mark, that's a good name for you ... Mark." Ed Whalen has been well chronicled. Sometimes he comes up with great comments like when he was talking about how former Calgary manager John Foley passed away and it was very touching, but other times he really shows contempt for wrestling which is obviously something your television announcer shouldn't be doing.

SEAN RYAN: Well, batten down the hatches and lock the door, it's time to vote for Ed Whalen ... once more. Seriously, Whalen has gotten on my nerves to the point where I have him listed as one of the three worst announcers of all-time.

GARY ZIMAK: David Crockett has elevated the dubious art of being a lousy wrestling announcer to a level that few of us could have ever imagined was possible.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Mark Lowrance's prattle makes Bill Mercer look like Dick Enberg.

JOHN JANCE: Brother, I'm glad I can name my main man, Stupidstar Billy Graham with those 24-inch pythons. I haven't listened to the MSG commentary for the past two shows just so I don't have to listen to this imbecile say "brother," thirty times per minute. Gordon Solie gets second. I saw him at the WWC awards presentation and it was enough to remind me of everything I tried to forget about the relic.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Some of my top picks from years gone by have dropped out of site. There is no Bill Mercer and Milt Avruskin scored his hat trick early in the year (three promotions out of business in one year--Pro Wrestling Canada, International Wrestling of Montreal and AWA Canada). I can't pick Ed Whalen. While he has received his fair share of criticism and not without merit, he doesn't bother me and his exchanges with Makhan Singh are usually

good for a laugh or two. Brother Graham wins based on his work at Summer Sham. I hate to pick Graham or Al Hayes since it's sad as in the 70s both were among the best interviews in wrestling.

MARK MADDEN: David Crockett's real bad, but Larry Nelson's ridiculous facial expressions and pandering baby face comments make me want to jump through the television set and DDT him off Verne Gagne's head.

ERNIE SANTILLI: From coast-to-coast and border-to-border, Rod Truongard takes the Ken Resnick award for stinking up the AWA and the WWF in the same year. His know-it-all delivery while mislabeling every move and botching up most names thoroughly annoys me. Runner-up is Lord Alfred Hayes. He should change his surname to Haze, because that's what he sounds like he's in more than half the time. Gorilla Monsoon is aptly named after a counterproductive wind-storm that nobody welcomes.

CATEGORY B -- WINNERS JUDGED BY MOST FIRST PLACE VOTES

BEST WRESTLING MOVE

- 1. KEIICHI YAMADA'S SHOOTING STAR PRESS 177
- 2. Hiroshi Hase's Northern Lights Suplex 42
- 3. Owen Hart's moonsault press 38
- 4. Midnight Express vegomatic 34
- 5. Owen Hart's rope walk hip toss 22

Honorable Mention: Jake Roberts' DDT 13, Atlantis' back flip splash and press 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Jimmy Snuka's Superfly splash
- 1982 - Super Destroyer (Scott Irwin)'s superplex
- 1983 - Jimmy Snuka's Superfly splash
- 1984 - Davey Boy Smith's power clean in combination with Dynamite Kid's dropkick off the top ropes
- 1985 - Tiger Mask's dive, with a mid-air flip, outside the ring
- 1986 - Chavo Guerrero's back flip flying body press
- 1987 - Keiichi Yamada's shooting star press

Try as I may, I can't come up with anything better than the shooting star press, but I do love the Com-mandos double splash.

MIKE WOOD: TBS dumping Virgil Runnels as booker.

CHRIS ZAVISA: It is extremely difficult to come up with something new that the fans haven't seen before. But Yamada's shooting star flip is simply breathtaking. He really doesn't use it enough, but when he does-WOW.

JOE LANCELLO: Keiichi Yamada's shooting star press is better than Owen Hart's imitation of the same move. Hart is a little too graceful.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: The Saito suplex is a personal favorite of mine. It adds a touch of realism to the match.

JOHN CORRIGAN: Yamada's shooting star press is the most amazing move I've ever seen.

HARDEST WORKER

- 1. RIC FLAIR 178
- 2. Ted DiBiase 59
- 3. Bobby Fulton 49
- 4. Owen Hart 27
- 5. Tatsumi Fujinami 24
- Samson Fuyuki 24

Honorable Mention: Barry Windham 12. Kazuo Yamazaki 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Ric Flair
- 1986 - Ric Flair
- 1987 - Ric Flair

Lots of guys qualify here but I'm going to pick Samson Fuyuki. He's an average wrestler who has had several Match-of-the-year caliber matches and is in the top 50 despite having no reason for being there other than he works so darn hard every night. I want to give special credit to Flair, however. He works as hard as anyone, and at the current stage of his career, he really doesn't have to. He's already made himself into the legend of this era and could easily get by and stay over through his interviews, his charisma, and working moderately hard and having good matches. But he still goes out there and does it almost every night, and even on his off-nights, he virtually never has what can be called a bad match.

SMM: Tatsumi Fujinami has had good matches with guys who aren't that great, Bobby Fulton and Keiichi Yamada all deserve recognition, but I'll go with Ted DiBiase. With his gimmick, he could easily cut down and take it easy, but he hasn't.

GARY ZIMAK: He might be stale, but nobody works as hard night-after-night as Ric Flair.

CHRIS ZAVISA: This seems to be the year that everyone is knocking Slick Ric. Is he finally on the downside of his career? Regardless, the man still works his tail off every night carrying younger guys like Luger to good matches. I watched him in Detroit go 20 minutes against Sting after being in a sick bed with a high fever for three days and he still pulled out all the stops. The man is the consummate professional.

MICHELLE JOHNSON: I picked Ted DiBiase over Ric Flair because he doesn't have the same pressure on him to work a good match that Flair does. It would be very easy for DiBiase to just to through the motions like most of the other Titan wrestlers do. He deserves recognition for his dedication.

GEORGE MARANVILLE: Pat Tanaka. It should be Ric Flair but you can't win doing the same

stuff with the same guy night-after-night. Tanaka is well trained and he takes great bumps.

BIGGEST SHOCK OF THE YEAR

- 1. DEATH OF BRUISER BRODY 352
- 2. Death of Adrian Adonis 21
- 3. Success of UWF 10
- Ted Turner buys NWA 10
- 5. Barry Windham turns heel 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Tommy Rich winning NWA title
- 1982 - Otto Wanz winning AWA title
- 1983 - Harley Race winning NWA title
- 1984 - Death of David Von Erich
- 1985 - WWF getting on network television
- 1986 - Magnum T.A.'s automobile accident
- 1987 - Jim Crockett purchases UWF

There's nothing more to say about the death of Bruiser Brody that hasn't been said.

MIKE WOOD: The murder of Bruiser Brody, a numbing real-life case of man's inhumanity to man invades the fantasy world of pro wrestling and takes away a legendary performer.

GARY ZIMAK: For close followers of the sport, it's hard to imagine an event occurring all year that even comes close to producing the shock felt when Bruiser Brody was murdered.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: I was never a big Bruiser Brody fan, but when I saw and read of his death, a truly sick feeling came over me. Not only was I shocked, but I was saddened beyond belief.

SCOTT HUDSON: Adrian Adonis' death was not so much a shock as it was a tragedy. Hundreds of people die in car accidents every day. The murder of Bruiser Brody was a shock of the ultimate magnitude, one of the most famous wrestlers in the world being stabbed by another wrestler.

KLON: The death of a legend and the bizarre events that followed. On the surface it seems so simple, one guy flipped out and killed another, especially since the victim was such a controversial figure who was determined to do things his way or not at all. Apparently this is a situation which will never be resolved and it eats away like a bite, but whose itch can never be eliminated. Jose Gonzales has set about from day one to go about his business as usual with seeming disregard for the events of that night. But the man with the question marks beside his name is Carlos Colon. I believe in my heart that he can tell the whole story, but doubt he ever will.

ED VARNER: I hadn't heard the news when I received the Observer the week of Brody's murder. When I opened it and saw the picture, a lump grew in my throat. I knew he was dead before I read anything. Still, several minutes later a bigger shock came over me as I read how he died.

GREG ANDERSON: Nothing I read in the Observer all year could compare to the shock and sick feeling that came over me when I read that Brody was killed, and it was made worse because of the knowledge that another wrestler did it.

JOHN JANCE: The murder of Bruiser Brody. Nothing has ever brought as much rage and sorrow in the surrealistic world of pro wrestling than this deed. What makes it even harder to deal with is that it looks like the assassin will not get the punishment he deserves and that Carlos Colon still has a place for him in the organization.

DAN CERQUITELLA: The Brody death. I just couldn't believe it. When I read it, I just kept saying, No, No.

MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL TACTIC

- 1. FRITZ VON ERICH'S BRUSH WITH DEATH 134
- 2. WWC still employs Jose Gonzales 41
- 3. WWF ignoring the death of Adrian Adonis on television 40
- 4. Carlos Colon using wife in angle 36
- 5. NWA reviving the Midnight Rider 17

Honorable Mention: NWA and WWF ignoring the death of Bruiser Brody on television 12. Elizabeth shedding her skirt at Summer Slam 12. NWA using Magnum T.A. in angle 12. Rick Rude's tights 10

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Usage of "The Monster" and saying he was built in a laboratory in Transylvania by LeBelle promotion
- 1982 - Bob Backlund as WWF champion
- 1983 - Pretending Eddie Gilbert had re-injured his neck after original injury took place in auto accident by WWF
- 1984 - Blackjack Mulligan faking heart attack in Florida by Championship Wrestling from Florida
- 1985 - Usage of Mike Von Erich's near fatal illness to sell Cotton Bowl tickets by World Class
- 1986 - Equating an angle of Chris Adams' blindness with the death of Gino Hernandez by World Class
- 1987 - World Class handling of Mike Von Erich's death

This year has plenty of strong qualifiers. The WWF's ignoring Adrian Adonis' death, all things considered, should be a winner. So should Fritz Von Erich's near-brush with death, not only because it was far beyond wrestling's normal bad taste but because they played upon the deaths of David and Mike and exploited them once again for profit in trying to drum up sympathy. As far as I'm concerned, while it's not a winner, I think the NWA deserves some criticism for never mentioning the deaths of both Adonis and Brody. It would have shown some class, although it isn't like either was a headliner for them recently. It's not deserving of a winner, but they really shouldn't ignore tragedies of this type. Even if the promotions are rivals, most wrestlers do consider it all one business and Brody and Adonis were kind of like fraternity brothers to everyone in a weird way. Far and away the winner is Carlos Colon still employing Jose Gonzales after all that has happened, especially given the suspicious nature of the investigation, witnesses failing to testify and allowing him television time.

He'll have a strong contender next year when Invader #1 makes his triumphant return to the squared circle, portrayed once again as a national hero.

ROLAND MESSIER: Fritz Von Erich's "heart attack" ranks as one of the lowest stunts ever in wrestling. Hasn't Fritz learned from his own family tragedies? He must be wishing for bad karma for constantly using family tragedies to sell wrestling tickets, and now he had to create a phony tragedy to keep the sinking ship afloat. Fritz must not have a conscience and is really a disgrace, especially for trying to turn the angle into a life-and-death situation.

ED VARNER: I hope when Vince Jr. kicks the bucket that the media and the wrestling world ignore it and pretend he never existed either.

SCOTT WILLIAMS: The Von Erichs broke new ground with Fritz' brush with death. This, in and of itself wouldn't have been the most disgusting if they hadn't have played it as another Von Erich family tragedy and tried to tie it in to the family's authentic mishaps.

BRUCE MITCHELL: I'll never forget sitting at the Bash watching a scaffold match where a guy with a blown-out knee and one of Crockett's most loyal employees and its oldest full-time wrestler, Ivan Koloff, had to take the bump from the top. What if someone had taken a false step? Yes, the scaffold wasn't that high this year but the whole thing was just disgusting. It showed us that to the promotion, wrestlers were nothing more than pieces of meat. The fact is, the match had zero heat, which only made it worse. What's next? Live chicken fights?

BOB CLOSSON: This year's Von Erich award goes to Kerry for announcing his divorce and advertising for a new girl at the Sportatorium.

LARRY LOVELL: Titan's not mentioning the death of Adonis on their television shows carried their policy of nothing but the present too far. Although Brody never worked much for the NWA in recent years or for the WWF, they both should have made at least a passing mention of his death. I also thought the Crocketts should have acknowledged the death of Jay Youngblood a few years back.

JOHN JANCE: The WWF ignoring the death of Adonis. After destroying the image of one of the top stars of the 80s, however out of shape he had become, they had the nerve after his passing to make a reference to him in the Toronto newspaper of not being a personality they wanted to show because they promoted wholesome family entertainment.

TERESA DEMARIE: The WWF not allowing either their wrestlers to talk about Adonis' death on television or television stations to use their video clips of Adonis. Vince sank to a new low of reprehensible behavior this year.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: The touch with death that Fritz nearly encountered last year went beyond the scope of selling tickets, especially when they alluded to the real tragedies the family has encountered. It was a fitting send-off to Fritz' wrestling career.

NEIL NEWMAN: The Tony Anthony-Tom Prichard angle. Domestic violence is a serious problem in the

world and the CWF exploited it when Lady Mystic claimed Anthony hit her and showed up with a black eye. Prichard only made it worse when he told her to call the rape crisis hot line. This was much worse than when Savage used to threaten Elizabeth.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: The Angle with Tully, Dusty and Magnum with the baseball bat was truly sickening. Where does Dusty get off using a man who isn't recovered from a life-threatening accident to pump himself up. No contest here.

MIKE WOOD: Actually, Fritz' heart attack was real. He had just heard from his accountant.

SMM: We didn't have to put up with as much Von Erich b.s. as in the past. WWC is a strong contender for letting Jose Gonzales go on television and claim his innocence. The WWF's constant and blatant lying upsets me greatly. No lie is too big or too small for them to tell. The way they handled Adonis' death and the lies that came out of their mouths in the wake of it was truly disgusting.

DAVID LEVIN: It's a tie between the Rick Rude/Cheryl Roberts angle and the annual WCCW entry, the Fritz Von Erich heart attack. When fiction crosses into reality, then reality becomes the fiction and all is lost. And speaking of naming awards, this one should be the WCCW worst promotional tactic of the year award. They'll keep it in house most of the time, I think.

JON KARESH: Titan not acknowledging Adrian Adonis' death was a new low for this category. Adrian Adonis worked for Vince McMahon for years. He held his tag team championship, and more importantly, he ruined his career by becoming a member of Vince's circus as Adorable Adrian. I know that a lot of Adonis' problems were his own fault, including his weight. But to say nothing about his death goes beyond the realm of decency. Why would it hurt them to acknowledge it? It is stupid enough not to acknowledge wrestlers' pasts, but the guy is dead now, for crying out loud. By acknowledging the death it wouldn't have hurt Titan in the least. Actually, it would. It would give fans some hope that the promotion has a slight bit of class, and save them from the disappointment later of finding out for sure that it really doesn't have any.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Fritz Von Erich's fake heart attack. For such a supposed good Christian to pull such a tasteless stunt on Christmas no less was downright nauseating. What next? Claim the lead heel crucified Kevin and have him return from the dead on Easter?

CHRIS ZAVISA: The phony heart attack by Fritz Von Erich was really bad was not just the idea of the angle, but how they used it in conjunction with the real tragedies that have befallen the family. They cheapened the real-life heartbreak that this family has been saddled with.

MICHELLE JOHNSON: The WWC for trying to get sympathy for Jose Gonzales.

BRIAN DALEY: Titan not mentioning Adonis' death is the winner. It's one thing to pretend nothing exists outside of your own promotion

when it comes to wrestling, but when a human being who played a major recent role in your organization dies an untimely death and not one word is spoken about it on television, even though it wouldn't have meant giving any other promotion publicity, well, I guess the action speaks for itself.

GEORGE MARANVILLE: Technically, the WWF not acknowledging Adrian Adonis' death is not a promotional tactic, but not allowing Entertainment Tonight to use any footage and that ga-ga about "not agreeing with his lifestyle" is just more evidence of what an incredible bastard Vince McMahon really is.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: That thing when Andre collapses was a real sickening Von Erich thing to do.

STEVE GENERALLI: The Vince McMahon propaganda machine. The uncooperativeness in the Adonis situation is just one example of a bad organization that works in a fantasy world and tries to create its fantasy world to the media. In their world, Adrian Adonis was a gay rights activist, Leonard/Lalonde was the all-time pay-per-view champ and nobody existed named Bruno Sammartino.

TRENT WALTERS: Stampede wrestling, for making me watch Brick Bronsky wrestle.

PAUL HANLIN: Rick Rude's tights with Cheryl Roberts' face on them was the nadir of a bountiful year in this category. Cheap heat at its worst.

BEST COLOR COMMENTATOR

- 1. JESSE VENTURA 345
- 2. Makhan Singh 40
- 3. Jim Cornette 9
- 4. Bobby Heenan 7
- 5. Bobby Jagers 6

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - Michael Hayes
- 1987 - Jesse Ventura

Jesse Ventura gets it this year because there was no competition. Makhan Singh had to play off Ed Whalen and really, he wasn't competition either. Bobby Jagers just does a combination Bobby Heenan/Roddy Piper imitation. Next year, however, Jesse will have real competition from Cornette and Paul Dangerously on the a.m. show, but Jesse should still win easily because who wants to wake up and watch David Crockett?

GARY ZIMAK: Even though Jesse has his bad nights, I don't think there's anyone that can touch him in this category.

BRIAN DALEY: Jim Cornette. I really don't think Jesse Ventura deserves half the acclaim he receives. About 90 percent of his work is done in a studio where he has the power to review footage, rehearse his lines, retakes his mistakes and edit out stupid remarks. With all those advantages, I would think he'd be even better than he is.

JEFF BOWDREN: Jesse Ventura was the best and got my vote, but I did like Makhan Singh with Ed "We won't take the camera off my face until the wrestlers are finished with their angle" Whalen.

MARK MADDEN: Jesse Ventura is the only saving grace on most WWF telecasts. He's the only color commentator who can snipe with his counterparts and not make it seem like third-graders acting up when the teacher turns her back. You know what I mean, Bobby and Gino.

STRONGEST WRESTLER

- 1. STEVE WILLIAMS 196
- 2. Road Warrior Animal 110
- 3. Davey Boy Smith 17
- 4. Doug Furnas 11
- 5. Rick Steiner 10

Honorable Mention: Anabolic Warrior 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Tony Atlas
- 1982 - Ken Patera
- 1983 - Hulk Hogan
- 1984 - Butch Reed
- 1985 - Road Warrior Animal
- 1986 - Road Warrior Animal
- 1987 - Steve Williams

Steve Williams does things that human beings shouldn't be able to do.

MARK MADDEN: There are guys who can bench press more and dead lift more, I'm sure, but nobody demonstrates power in a wrestling match like Dr. Death. He was obviously in the weight room during his public speaking courses, unfortunately.

CHRIS ZAVISA: At the Joe Louis Arena, I watched Williams press Bubba Rogers three times in a row in complete awe. I don't think anyone else could do that. While his wrestling has taken a turn for the worst, his still shows his strength.

READERS' FAVORITE WRESTLER

- 1. RIC FLAIR 124
- 2. Owen Hart 45
- 3. Bruiser Brody 27
- 4. Ted DiBiase 26
- 5. Midnight Express 18
- Nobuhiko Takada 18

Honorable Mention: Barry Windham 17, Keiichi Yamada 17, Bret Hart 14, Akira Maeda 12, Terry Funk 11, Sting 10, Tatsumi Fujinami 9, Randy Savage 9, Riki Choshu 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Ric Flair
- 1986 - Ric Flair
- 1987 - Ric Flair

READERS' MOST HATED WRESTLER

- 1. DUSTY RHODES 166
- 2. Anabolic Warrior 57
- 3. Hulk Hogan 36
- 4. Jose Gonzales 29
- 5. Jim Duggan 15

Honorable Mention: Junkfood Dog 11, Andre the Giant 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Ivan Putski
1985 - Hulk Hogan
1986 - Hulk Hogan
1987 - Dusty Rhodes

WORST WRESTLER

1. ANABOLIC WARRIOR 176
2. Andre the Giant 69
3. Junkfood Dog 64
4. Dino Bravo 12
5. Rufus Jones 11

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Ivan Putski
1985 - Uncle Elmer (Stan Frazier)
1986 - Mike Von Erich
1987 - Junkfood Dog

Andre the Giant is a crippled man who probably doesn't have much time left to live, suffering from a sad giantism disease that makes him a freak. He has no conditioning and is grossly overweight. And yet, he is still a better worker than Junkyard Dog or the Ultimate Warrior. The Warrior gets this on general principles, since Junkyard was at least fired by the WWF.

SMM: The Ultimate Roider is not only the worst wrestler of the year, but is also one of the worst of all-time.

MARK MADDEN: The Ultimate Warrior can do absolutely nothing in a wrestling ring remotely resembling a wrestling move. All he is a living monument to better living through chemicals. I honestly wouldn't be surprised if he died in a wrestling ring.

DAVID LEVIN: 1988 was the year of the steroid bashers. So let's pick on the Anabolic Warrior. In 1987, you asked what kids who followed the Dingo Warrior should be called, and the response was Little Dingbats. It's not so funny when you think his followers could be called Little Anabols. It's too scary to even think about.

TERESA DEMARIE: I wonder if when JYD sat down for Thanksgiving dinner he felt as though he's committing cannibalism.

JON KARESH: Here comes the mighty Ultimate Warrior running to the ring. The guy has a body that at first glance seems incredible. Then you get a closer look. He can hardly breath. His body looks uneven and bloated. His skin looks older than it should. Then he starts to try and wrestle. He can do a few very simple moves, but is incapable of working for more than a short time without getting out of breath. He has no fluidity whatsoever.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Can't the Ultimate Warrior at least take up jogging or something?

CHRIS ZAVISA: The Ultimate Warrior personifies in one individual everything that is wrong with wrestling today. His body is courtesy of the wonders of chemistry. He doesn't belong in a wrestling ring even though he's been a wrestler for three years now. His one or two minute matches in which all

that happens is his opponents run into him are disgusting. He makes Lex Luger look like an Olympic marathon runner.

WORST TAG TEAM

1. BOLSHEVIKS 195
2. Soldat Ustinov & Teijo Khan 41
3. Powers of Pain 21
4. Top Guns 18
Commandos 18

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - The Crusher & Baron Von Raschke
1985 - Uncle Elmer & Cousin Junior
1986 - Junkfood Dog & George Steele
1987 - Jimmy Valiant & Bugsy McGraw

For a team that is pushed like they are something, the Powers of Pain are really nothing. They may not be the absolute worst, since Barbarian can be a pretty good wrestler at times, but I've been less than impressed every time I've seen them and I've mainly seen them in there with at least decent teams. To make the act complete, they completed the "Super Double," stinking up against Road Warrior and Road Warrior clones in both major federations and being managed by each federation's worst manager.

MIKE WOOD: Soldat Ustinov & Teijo Khan, but if Mr. Hellwig drops the IC title and finds a tag partner ...

JEFF BOWDREN: It's a toss-up between The Bolsheviks and the awesome duo of Soldat Ustinov & Teijo "My Wrestling Ability it a" Kahn, but I'll go with Titan's awesome Russians.

SMM: Every time I saw Ustinov & Khan on television, I turned the channel.

STEVE YOHE: I'd like to say any Russian team, but I'll go with Soldat Ustinov & Teijo Khan

WORST TELEVISION SHOW

1. AWA ON ESPN 111
2. NWA Main Event 88
3. Deep South 56
4. World Class 44
5. ICW Wrestling 41

Honorable Mention: TBS World Championship Wrestling 22, Wild West Wrestling 16, WWF Prime Time Wrestling 12

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - WWF All-Star Wrestling
1985 - Championship Wrestling from Florida
1986 - California Championship Wrestling
1987 - World Class Championship Wrestling

MIKE WOOD: The weekly two-hour torture session from Fort Worth.

REX REED: Deep South stinks for a show that shouldn't be good. AWA stinks for a show that should be good.

GARY ZIMAK: Savoldi's ICW show has to be seen to be believed. They have no talent, an an-

nouncer, with a more annoying English accent than Alfred Hayes and a heel ref doing color commentary who looks and talks like Jerry Lewis.

MARK MADDEN: I could do a better television show than Deep South in my basement. In fact, I think Deep South did a few shows in my basement. In comparison with Gordon Solie's abortions from Florida, it makes Gordon's show look like the UWF of 1986.

DAN CERQUITELLA: The AWA has absolutely no entertainment value.

TOM ROBINSON: The NWA Main Event reminds me of a Phil Dedrick speech.

JEFF BOWDREN: You haven't lived until you've seen the dreaded Global Wrestling Alliance television show. I used to love to see the advertisements in the Observer for people wanting to trade for GWA tapes. I never could figure out why. Terrible heels. Terrible faces. Boring matches and angles that Albert Einstein couldn't even figure out.

ERNIE SANTILLI: The Legends of World Class wrestling. Deceased wrestlers hyped endlessly by an announcer whose brain is deceased on a daily basis.

STEVE GENERALLI: We can pick on the ultra low-budget things and the NWA syndicated shows are still mainly not worth watching, but my vote still goes to Prime Time Wrestling with Heenan & Monsoon. For starters, this is the most stale broadcast team in sports. They sit in their cardboard set covered with products and watch recent dud matches. Heenan is a bad cartoon and Monsoon is like a nagging mother-in-law.

WORST MANAGER

1. MR. FUJI	162
2. Paul Jones	102
3. Oliver Humperdink	52
4. Abdul Wizal	36
5. Frenchy Martin	30

Honorable Mention: Baron Von Raschke 22, Downtown Bruno 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Mr. Fuji
- 1985 - Mr. Fuji
- 1986 - Paul Jones
- 1987 - Mr. Fuji

If I've got to pick one, it's Fuji. At least Paul Jones is kept with preliminary guys now. Besides, Jones also looks bad because he's in the same company as Jim Cornette while Fuji hardly has anyone of that calibre to make him look bad. But he does a good job by himself.

MIKE WOOD: Gary Hart. What did Donna Rice ever see in this guy.

JON KARESH: For some inexplicable reason, Mr. Fuji got a push this year and tag team champions to manage. Not only is his act bad, but it should be considered an offensive racial stereotype. I suppose Vince decided that one offensive racial stereotype (Slick) wasn't enough in his managers' corps.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Oliver Humperdink killed a gold mine in not one, but both major federations.

GREG ANDERSON: It's close between Paul Jones and Mr. Fuji but I've got to go with Fuje and Stooge. At least Jones can do an incompetent interview but Hideous Harry is a total zero.

JOHN JANCE: As bad as Paul Jones is, Paul Ellering brought new meaning to the word useless. The Warriors are so good on interviews that Precious is reduced to just standing behind them and barely issuing a coherent sentence, although his routine about donations to the Dusty eye-bank charity was great. But the winner is the man who owns this category. Master Fuji came off the worst feud of 1987, against Smellbilly Jim in tuxedo matches, then screwed up a fairly intricate double turn at the Survivors Series. He was so pathetic in the set-up and attack on Demolition that the fans had no idea what was going on. The fact that many felt he had turned, and not the teams, it testimony to his inability to perform in anything but the stereotypical manner which went stale in the days of Toru Tanaka. Tanaka's film appearances are more menacing than Fuji in his best interviews.

BILL KUNKEL: Frenchy Martin adds nothing to a guy who can use all the help he can get.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: Frenchy Martin sucks as bad as watching Dino and the Hacksaw in a 30 minute draw.

WORST MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. HIROSHI WAJIMA VS. TOM MAGEE 4/21	
Kawasaki	80
2. Anabolic Warrior vs. Hercules 3/27	
Atlantic City	56
3. Anabolic Warrior vs. Honkeytonk 8/29 MSG9	
4. Andre the Giant vs. Junkfood Dog 10/6 Paris	
5. Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude 3/27	
Atlantic City	27

Honorable Mention: Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant 2/5 Indianapolis 25, Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant 3/27 Atlantic City 16, Randy Savage vs. Andre the Giant 9/29 MSG 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Fabulous Moolah vs. Wendi Richter from Madison Square Garden
- 1985 - Fred Blassie vs. Lou Albano from Nassau Coliseum
- 1986 - Roddy Piper vs. Mr. T boxing match from Nassau Coliseum
- 1987 - Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant 3/29 Pontiac

As bad as some of the WWF matches have been, particularly on their pay-per-view shows, there was nothing resembling the Hiroshi Wajima vs. Tom Magee match from Japan. You have to see it to believe it. Nobody, and I mean nobody, could mistake it for anything but an all-time stinker.

SMM: The Tower of Doom was an idea whose time has never come. At a time when the NWA needed a good idea, they used the Tower of Dumb.

MARK MADDEN: Andre the Giant vs. Junkyard Dog from France. I think Junior booked it in a foreign country because they might throw him in jail for it here.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: After seeing the Ultimate Warrior vs. Hercules at Wrestlemania IV, it was easy to understand why Vince hid the Warrior in his next two pay-per-view events.

JON KARESH: The Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant match on NBC takes it. It may have been the only way to get the title away from Hogan without him doing a job, but an evil twin referee angle, which was immediately dropped? That finish caused more people to consider wrestling as a joke than ever before. It showed Vince makes no effort at all to make fans think wrestling just might be real in any respects. That was the first step leading to Wrestlemania IV being the dud it was.

DAN CERQUITELLA: The Ultimate Warrior vs. Honkeytonk Man from Summer Slam. What was really sad was watching Ultimate go for his splash and having to watch Honkeytonk have to totally rotate his body around while he's supposed to be out cold so he'd be in the right place. Pathetic, but at least it was short.

WORST FEUD

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. MIDNIGHT RIDER VS. TULLY BLANCHARD | 60 |
| 2. Jim Duggan vs. Dino Bravo | 49 |
| Brutus Beefcake vs. Ron Bass | 49 |
| 4. Junkfood Dog vs. Ron Bass | 39 |
| 5. Koloffs vs. Russian Assassins | 26 |

Honorable Mention: Andre the Giant vs. Jim Duggan 21, Kevin Sullivan vs. Jimmy Garvin 16, Nikita Koloff vs. Al Perez 15, Greg Valentine vs. Don Muraco 14, Anabolic Warrior vs. Honkeytonk Man 12, Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich 12, Anabolic Warrior vs. Hercules 10

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Andre the Giant vs. John Studd
1985 - Sgt. Slaughter vs. Boris Zhukov
1986 - Machines vs. King Kong Bundy & John Studd
1987 - George Steele vs. Danny Davis

There are a lot of feuds that involve mid-level guys with Titan that both stink and the feud stinks as well. But I'm looking here at bad booking. My pick is Jim Duggan vs. Dino Bravo. Granted, both guys stink in the ring, but Duggan was over going into the feud, but working with Bravo is a killer to anyone's heat. The whole idea of the feud was stupid anyway. Like we are at war with Quebec. Besides, all this flag stuff has been done to death, and past death. To add to all that, the matches have been some of the worst ones of the year as well.

GARY ZIMAK: Nothing about the Russian Assassins vs. Koloffs feud appealed to me at all. Everything from Ivan's baby face turn to the participants involved was a really unpleasant experience.

JOHN JANCE: Kevin Sullivan vs. Jim Garvin was pitiful. If someone can explain this feud in 500 words or less, be my guest. How did this feud end,

anyway? Was it ever resolved? I didn't care, so I long ago gave up trying to figure it out.

JEFF BOWDREN: Ron Bass and Brutus Beefcake have always been terrible, but at one time Jim Duggan was a damned good brawler type. However, ever since his feud with Dino Bravo, Duggan has managed to perform just slightly better than a corpse. And by the way, since when have we been at war with Canada?

DAN CERQUITELLA: Kevin Sullivan vs. Jimmy Garvin. It's like you kept wanting this to be a good feud, but it just wouldn't be. Jim Garvin as a baby face is boring. As a heel, he was great.

STEVE GENARELLI: The Dusty Rhodes vs. Larry Zbyszko with the pictures gets first here. Even if anybody cared, which they didn't, how could pictures be part of a wrestling angle. The Garvin/Precious/Sullivan thing was close. It had no interest and set up a dump concept for a pay-per-view match.

WORST ON INTERVIEWS

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| 1. STEVE WILLIAMS | 188 |
| 2. Anabolic Warrior | 68 |
| 3. Kerry Von Erich | 24 |
| 4. Tommy Rich | 13 |
| 5. Andre the Giant | 9 |

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Jimmy Snuka
1985 - Thunderbolt Patterson
1986 - Mike Von Erich
1987 - Buggy McGraw

I don't know of any wrestler who was over to begin with, that ruined it so much simply by having to do weekly interviews like Steve Williams. Last year, after the buy-out, Williams got the best reaction on NWA shows out here with the exception of Flair and the Road Warriors. Now, he means nothing, and it's those weekly classics that did it. Taking the cake was that interview from Japan. I still marvel that they let that thing on the air. I've always been curious as to what brilliance he said during the out takes, because it was abruptly cut. Like that was the best part or something?

NEIL NEWMAN: Steve Williams clinched the award before his heel turn. His style was summed up by one interchange between himself and Jim Ross. When Dr. Death rambled for three minutes during a segment on World Wide Wrestling, he turned to Ross saying, "Rossy, you look like you have no idea what I'm talking about."

MIKE WOOD: The Doctor performed a 52-week surgery on the English language which left the patient permanently traumatized.

SMM: Hulk Hogan makes me sick. He's so phony.

MIKE MILLER: I know Steve Williams will probably win, but at least he says words you can understand. Words, not sentences. The Ultimate Warrior can't even say words.

JOHN JANCE: The Ultimate Warrior. If only steroids could build up your brain.

TERESA DEMARIE: The Ultimate Warrior and Steve Williams are living proof of the theory of evolution. These people should never be allowed to talk on television as they disprove the notion that wrestlers have a brain.

SCOTT WILLIAMS: Steve Williams will become a lot better once he learns the language.

MICHELLE JOHNSON: Steve Williams. People like Hulk Hogan and the Ultimate Warrior suck, but at least they speak English. Williams has gotten better, but he deserves the award simply for his infamous mailbox interview.

SCOTT HUDSON: The Anabolic Warrior doesn't make any sense. Even when reading from cue cards, he screws things up so badly with his syntax that it's like listening to a foreign language. He is also the only wrestler I've ever seen actually blow up during an interview.

GEORGE MARANVILLE: Tommy "that's exactly right" Rich. The WWF is a wasteland of bad interviews, but I vividly remember one with Tommy Rich where he babbled incoherently for a while, then ran out and got his daughter who said she had to pee, so he almost threw her aside.

WORST PROMOTION

- 1. AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION 117
- 2. Oregon Wrestling Federation 116
- 3. World Wrestling Association 50
- 4. Deep South 42
- 5. World Class 40

Honorable Mention: National Wrestling Alliance 35, ICW 28, World Wrestling Federation 26, World Wrestling Council 15, National Wrestling Federation 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - AWA
- 1987 - World Class

Most of the promotions listed here I don't even consider promotions. But for a promotion that really is good in so many ways, can produce excellent house shows (but usually doesn't), has the best talent money can buy, I'm going to pick the NWA. Granted, these fly-by-nighters like OWF are far worse. Bob Geigel does make Jim Crockett look like Einstein. Anything David McLane does is a blight on whatever business it is considered to be a part of. And jeez, the WWC has its booker and part-owner indicted for murder and they let him wrestle the same night. But still, the NWA has potential to be the best promotion of the year, and fell so far short it isn't even funny.

SMM: The AWA is really sad as much as bad. Some places like Deep South and Central States can be picked on, but look what they have to work with and how much money they have to spend. The NWA has no excuse for what they've done, however. Look at all the talent they let go to waste just to appease a few egos. For I'll still pick the WWF. I don't live and die by ring work, and it doesn't bother me that they have a lot of bad

matches. What bothers me is they portray wrestling as a joke. They have done more to get wrestling across to millions of people, but they have done even more to hurt it.

TERESA DEMARIE: The AWA does the worst job in pretending to be a wrestling promotion.

ROLAND MESSIER: The WWF. Sure, they're not pro wrestling but for all the money, talent and production values they have, they usually produce nothing but bad wrestling, bad television, bad feuds, mainly bad angles and probably the worst live shows I've ever seen, including independents.

JOHN JANCE: The failure of Superclash points out how pathetic Verne Gagne's AWA has become. Whatever you may think of Dusty's attempts to ruin the NWA, Gagne helped lead to the decline of the AWA at a time when it was at its peak by refusing to let go of the weakest of 1940s and 1950s marketing techniques and his attempt to get over a lame product in the 1980s. His son being pushed was an embarrassment. The death knell may have been when they gave the title to Nick Bockwinkel from Stan Hansen. But provincialism, cronyism, racism and just plain stupidity won out in the end.

GARY ZIMAK: The NWA took the best talent and produced the worst product better than any other promotion around.

MIKE MILLER: Verne Gagne continually lies to the fans about everything. Verne should fold the AWA. Nobody watches it anymore. Not even AWA fans. The matches all suck and most of all, Verne sucks.

PAUL HANLIN: Is there any doubt? Jim Crockett Promotions went to hell in a hand basket. Just ask anyone who saw half or more of any given night's main events end with the ref bump, second ref counts the pin, only to be overruled by first ref who calls for the DQ and the title doesn't change. They treat their fans with WWF-like contempt. No wonder that the fans and the wrestlers abandoned JCP like it was the second coming of the Titanic.

BEST BOOKER

- 1. EDDIE GILBERT 261
- 2. Pat Patterson/Vince McMahon 110
- 3. Akira Maeda 24
- 4. Eric Embry 9
- 5. Seiji Sakaguchi 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - Dusty Rhodes
- 1987 - Vince McMahon

I'd really like to pick Eddie Gilbert here, since he took a dead promotion, well, past dead to be truthful, revived it temporarily, and the thing turned into a disaster the moment he left. But, while he put together good television shows and generally did an entertaining job and did the best job with a small promotion of any booker this year, his tenure did end in disaster. You can't be the best booker unless you've got an organization backing you up, and he didn't have it. He was planning on expanding while the promotion got

cold feet before they started. Vince McMahon and Pat Patterson get the pick. While you can second-guess some of their choices for top spots and who they push and who they don't push, they still have more successes than failures. Their angles usually mean something at the gate. They get over unique personalities and put together a television show that ties in perfectly with the house shows they promote. They survived the year without any disasters to speak of, and with as much name talent as they have, that is impressive. There are things they could do better, but they do it better than anyone else. Giant Baba does a good job as well, even though he is conservative, he never has the long-term bad times.

SMM: Lawler and Jarrett can often be interesting, but they get a bit too silly at times. All Japan may be a bit bland, but their booking doesn't seem to cause any internal problems. Eddie Gilbert was easily the best. He took a promotion that was in a coma and gave it a second life.

GARY ZIMAK: It's unfortunate that if you blinked your eye you might have missed Gilbert's metamorphosis of the CWF. It was an accomplishment that shouldn't go unrecognized in my book. His skills were actually a lot more evident after his departure.

JEFF BOWDREN: I love the idea that Akira Maeda, without a doubt the most "over" wrestler in the world at the time, doing a job for Nobuhiko Takada clean in the middle. If Inoki had allowed Masa Saito to get one clean pinfall on him last year, they would still be drawing mega-houses this year.

MARK MADDEN: There was nothing boring about anything in the CWF when Eddie Gilbert was there.

STEVE PRAZAK: I don't think Vince McMahon could do for Continental what Eddie Gilbert did.

DAVID LEVIN: Akira Maeda. It takes guts to take a clean pinfall when you're on top. But he did it.

DAN CERQUITELLA: Vince McMahon. It works. It sucks. But it works.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Eddie Gilbert edges out Giant Baba. Gilbert turned around a floundering promotion and made it hot almost overnight. Since he did it with almost no talent, he gets the award. I also think Baba did a hell of a job with his cast this year.

PROMOTER OF THE YEAR

1. VINCE MCMAHON	216
2. Akira Maeda	97
3. Jerry Jarrett	49
4. Gary Juster	42
5. Giant Baba	29

PREVIOUS WINNERS

First year award given

Really, it is unfair to compare some of these names with one another. For a guy who promotes local house shows, Gary Juster is the best I've seen. I've been to a lot of shows that he promotes in different cities and the details he's in charge of seem to always be taken care of. He is the only promoter

I've seen who honestly is concerned about fans having a good time. He isn't the only one in the world, but he's the only one who has promoted in this area. I know that he's well-respected by the media, by the wrestlers and by the office. Still, my pick is Akira Maeda. This is not meant as a pick against Vince McMahon, who is a great promoter when it comes to hyping and marketing a product and drawing fans, but even so, Maeda has to get first here. What he did this year is something McMahon could have never done. Do you think McMahon could pull out tomorrow from the WWF, take three wrestlers, one of whom is a key guy with a cult following, like say, Randy Savage, and two excellent workers who are middle-card guys, like say, Owen and Bret Hart, and three jobbers, take one key front office employee, and with six wrestlers and a two-man staff run monthly cards with no television publicity and draw a \$500,000 gate the third time out and do a national closed-circuit card three months later and sellout every show in between, some in less than an hour?

NEIL NEWMAN: Vince McMahon. Many people may hate him, but the bottom line in any business is profit and McMahon easily outdistances the pack. He may alienate people, but he has the best marketing and the most money because he earned it by pushing his company to the best of his ability. The ultimate show of success is staying power and stability and Titan has accomplished both for the past five years.

BILL HANRAHAN: Gary Juster is always a gentleman even when circumstances would have turned anyone else into a fire-breathing monster.

SMM: Giant Baba. Baba keeps rolling along and his best trait is that he keeps people happy and he does it by being both honest and fair. He put on a great tribute show for Bruiser Brody that was made to be a tribute and not an exploitation. When the fans made an outpouring of generosity to Barbara and Geoffrey Goodish, he thanked them by putting on a special card. I doubt any other promoter would do that. Ted DiBiase once said that Baba's handshake was as good as any written contract and I believe him.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: After Wrestlemania IV, there were WWF fans that gave reasons why that show was better than the first Clash of the Champions. The problem was that almost every reason given, press coverage for example, had nothing to do with which show was better. The reasons were why the WWF was the most successful. One cannot overlook the success of the WWF.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Gary Juster. When the NWA screwed me and several others in their \$50 Bash party in Detroit, Gary handled it with class and more than made everything right for us. He gave us ringside seats for the next show and had my son and I go into the locker room area and called out many of the stars for pictures. He even went into the locker room and got us autographs of the wrestlers who were dressing. He is a total class act.

MICHELLE JOHNSON: Stu Hart is one of the few promoters left who still realizes that though money is a necessary part of the business, it isn't

the only part. He's responsible for so many great wrestlers and great matches because he demands excellent wrestling over charisma from his employees. I think he has genuine concern about the future of wrestling and he deserves recognition for that.

BEST GIMMICK

- 1. VARSITY CLUB/RICK STEINER 132
- 2. Big Van Vader 130
- 3. Million Dollar Man 47
- 4. Big Bossman 23
- 5. Brother Love 18
- Buddy Rose/Avalanche as Beach Boys 18

Honorable Mention: Honkeytonk Man 14, Rick Rude's kissing girls 11

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - Adrian Street
- 1987 - Ted DiBiase's Million Dollar Man

The whole Rick Steiner/Mike Rotunda/Kevin Sullivan thing turned out be the most entertaining thing of the year. The funny part about it is the whole thing evolved by accident, not from long-range planning as a McMahon angle.

NEIL NEWMAN: Brother Love, although obnoxious, is a great parody on televangelists. Lately, because of the WWF glut, the shows have become predictable but Brother Love is the star of the show. Some people feel it is blasphemous to mix religion with wrestling. However, Brother Love is a parody of the few phony televangelists.

GARY ZIMAK: Big Van Vader gets my pick because of how over he is in Japan, based on minimal talent and one hell of a gimmick.

MARK MADDEN: Brother Love. Where would Bruce Prichard be if it wasn't for the Brother Love gimmick? Leon White would at least be wrestling independently without Big Van Vader. Brother Love is no Roddy Piper, but he's as over as anything the WWF has had since then and one of the few enjoyable things about the WWF.

DAVID LEVIN: Evil twin referees.

GREG ANDERSON: Pez Whatley as Willie B. Hert. I didn't think much of Pistol Pez or Shaska Whatley, but Willie B. was entertaining and seemed to get good heat.

DAN CERQUITELLA: The Varsity Club. I didn't want to like it, but I couldn't help liking it. Very entertaining.

WORST GIMMICK

- 1. MIDNIGHT RIDER 167
- 2. Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake 33
- 3. Akeem the African Dream 32
- 4. Mr. Perfect Curt Hennig 18
- 5. Unifying AWA and World Class titles 17

Honorable Mention: King Haku 15, Brother Love 14, Anabolic Warrior 11, Big Van Vader 9, Rick Rude kissing girls 9, Red Rooster 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - "Adorable" Adrian Adonis
- 1987 - "Adorable" Adrian Adonis

King Haku was a total waste of a position that should have been either dropped or given to a wrestler that would at least fit into the role. It isn't like Harley Race was over to begin with. And now we have those two to feud with one another. It makes sense, but it's a waste of time. With all the good wrestlers at their disposal, the least they could have done was find someone who could play the gimmick better.

MIKE WOOD: Seeing Terry Taylor pretend to not know how to wrestle against talent like JYD was pathetic and a slap in the face to fans.

PAUL SHERMAN: The television show "Learning the Ropes." That the show is a laugh-less comedy is irrelevant. What's important is that the last three weeks I've seen episodes featuring Ricky Morton, who is gone, Dick Murdoch as a heel, which he hasn't been in months and Ivan Koloff as a heel. Also for a show that was supposedly designed to get NWA stars crossed-over, it made no use of its major stars.

SMM: Rocky Mountain Thunder. We had to put up with him only because Verne wanted to use up a chyron graphic.

SCOTT WILLIAMS: Brutus Beefcake. Actually this whole WWF ritual of cutting the hair or putting snakes on helpless people, especially by the faces, is appalling.

TOM ROBINSON: Even though I like it, Mr. Perfect is a bomb.

LARRY LOVELL: I'm tired of seeing anyone using animals in their act. You feel bad for the animal and embarrassed for the wrestler.

JEFF BOWDREN: Making Terry Taylor into a rooster was bad, but turning Owen Hart into a chicken was enough to keep Vince from winning promoter of the year.

GEORGE MARANVILLE: I know that even those who despise the WWF have found something entertaining about Brother Love, but Prichard was only funny for about a month, if that. Maybe I would like it if he didn't act like just another wrestler playing a part. I think Brother Ernest had more potential than this.

JOE COUGHLIN: Akeem. The skit introducing this was one of the most offensively racist things I've seen in years, in wrestling or anywhere else. I'm surprised you didn't make more mention of it.

MOST EMBARRASSING WRESTLER

- 1. GEORGE STEELE 83
- 2. Dusty Rhodes 75
- 3. Anabolic Warrior 29
- Jose Gonzales 29
- 5. Giant Baba 26
- Andre the Giant 26

Honorable Mention: Akeem 20, Jimmy Valiant 14, Rick Rude 11

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1986 - Adrian Adonis

1987 - George Steele

I'm not picking a wrestler here, I'm going to pick a promotion, and it's the World Wrestling Council. You don't have any idea how hard it has been to justify being a fan of wrestling or having anything to do with wrestling around most of my friends, who don't like it to begin with, after what happened to Brody, and what happened in the aftermath. I haven't lived in Texas for several years, so I never have to explain the goings on with the Von Erichs to friends. I wasn't so lucky with Dusty Rhodes. The first time I went to an NWA show with my sister-in-law and she saw Dusty step into the War Games with all these guys who looked like Road Warriors, Ligers, Flairs, and Barry Windhams and she said, "What's that slob doing in the ring," it was an easy explanation ("He's the boss"), but it made to realize for the millionth time just how silly the whole thing was.

MIKE WOOD: Brutus Beefcake's routine is so embarrassing that "Love Boat" reruns are intellectually stimulating by comparison.

NEIL NEWMAN: Abdullah the Butcher. Anytime a man is so fat that his pectorals touch his feet, he is an embarrassment. He may be dedicated to his profession, but he stands for everything that is wrong with the business.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: I chose the Ultimate Warrior over Andre the giant. Andre has had health problems and has a plausible excuse for being a total disgrace. The only excuse the Warrior has is he's a bum.

DAVID LEVIN: Rick Rude, when he parades around in those awful tights with Cheryl Roberts' picture on them, or gyrates on his opponent. I used to be able to watch Rude, even when he was with Percy Pringle, but no more.

GREG ANDERSON: Although I do like Abdullah the Butcher's act as long as nobody else is around, his pectorals make it hard to eat dinner while watching.

JOHN JANCE: Puerto Rico was the site of two infamous events this year. The first was the July tragedy. The second was them hiring Rufus Jones to wrestle. Flabby pectorals, arms waving, shucking and jiving through a poor imitation of Step'n'Fetchit. The Freight Train has no excuses. Even Stupidstar Graham would refuse to call him "Brother."

MICHELLE JOHNSON: Akeem. How do you even begin to explain what he's trying to do.

BILL HANRAHAN: George Steele edges out Beefcake, Bass, Ultimate Warrior, etc. The unfortunate thing about him is that so many non-fans or very casual fans who know I really enjoy wrestling equate it with the overblown, degrading garbage that the WWF turns out. Due to the WWF and characters like this, I constantly have to justify my relationship to wrestling.

BRIAN DALEY: Andre the Giant is embarrassing to the extent that he undermines the credibility of the sport, if that is possible. Fans ask how is it that Hogan can't destroy an immobile, obviously out of shape and unhealthy freak in less than 30 seconds. I try to explain it is the same reason that Nic Volkoff is allowed to travel throughout the U.S. by the Soviet government.

SCOTT HUDSON: I am forever having to explain Dusty Rhodes to casual fans. In a business filled with Lex Ligers, Anabolic Warriors, Young Stallions and Stings, most folks ask me why a fat old man who they remember from their childhood is still on television and pretending to chew non-existent bubble-gum. Doesn't that fit the criteria for this award.

CHAMPIONS OF 1988

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

WWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Hulk Hogan (def. Iron Sheik January 23, 1984, in New York)
2. Andre the Giant (def. Hogan February 5, 1988, in Indianapolis, IN)
3. Title declared vacant after Andre tried to sell title to Ted DiBiase
4. Randy Savage (def. DiBiase in finals of tournament March 27, 1988, in Atlantic City, NJ)

INTERCONTINENTAL

1. Honkeytonk Man (def. Ricky Steamboat June 2, 1987, in Buffalo, NY)
2. Anabolic Warrior (def. Honkeytonk Man August 29, 1988, in New York)

WWF TAG TEAM

1. Rick Martel & Tito Santana (def. Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart October 27, 1987, in Syracuse, NY)
2. Demolition (def. Martel & Santana March 27, 1988, in Atlantic City, NJ)

WWF WOMEN'S

1. Sensational Sherri (def. Flabulous Moolah July 24, 1987, in Houston, TX)
2. Rockin Robin (def. Sherri October 7, 1988, in Paris, France)

WWF WOMEN'S TAG TEAM

1. Leilani Kai & Judy Martin
2. Jumping Bomb Angels (def. Kai & Martin January 24, 1988, in Hamilton, ONT)
3. Kai & Martin (def. Angels June 8, 1988, in Omiya, Japan)

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Ric Flair (def. Ron Garvin November 26, 1987, in Chicago, IL)

UNITED STATES

1. Dusty Rhodes (def. Lex Luger November 26, 1987, in Chicago, IL)
2. Rhodes suspended, title declared vacant
3. Barry Windham (def. Nikita Koloff in finals of tournament May 13, 1988, in Houston, TX)

NWA TELEVISION

1. Nikita Koloff (def. Tully Blanchard August 18, 1987, in Fayetteville, NC)
2. Mike Rotunda (def. Koloff January 26, 1988, in Raleigh, NC)
3. Rick Steiner (def. Rotunda December 26, 1988, in Norfolk, VA)

WESTERN STATES

1. Barry Windham (def. Black Bart in finals of tournament June 20, 1987, in Houston, TX)
2. Larry Zbyszko (def. Windham January 24, 1988, in Uniondale, NY)

NWA TAG TEAM

1. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson (def. Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson September 2, 1987, in Meisenheimer, NC)
2. Barry Windham & Lex Luger (def. Anderson & Blanchard March 27, 1988, in Greensboro, NC)
3. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson (def. Windham & Luger April 20, 1988, in Tallahassee, FL)
4. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane (def. Blanchard & Anderson September 10, 1988, in Philadelphia, PA)
5. Road Warriors (def. Eaton & Lane October 29, 1988, in New Orleans, LA)

U.S. TAG TEAM

1. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane (def. Ron Garvin & Barry Windham in tournament final May 16, 1987, in Atlanta, GA)
2. Bobby Fulton & Tommy Rogers (def. Eaton & Lane April 26, 1988, in Chattanooga, TN)
3. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane (def. Fulton & Rogers July 10, 1988, in Baltimore, MD)
4. Eaton & Lane vacated titles due to winning NWA tag team titles
5. Bobby Fulton & Tommy Rogers (def. Eddie Gilbert & Ron Simmons in tournament final December 7, 1988, in Chattanooga, TN)
6. Steve Williams & Kevin Sullivan (def. Fulton & Rogers December 26, 1988, in Norfolk VA)

CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

CWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Jerry Lawler (def. Manny Fernandez in tournament final December 7, 1987, in Memphis, TN)
2. Max Pain (def. Lawler February 8, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
3. Brickhouse Brown (def. Pain via forfeit May 23, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
4. Max Pain (def. Brown June 27, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
5. Phil Hickerson (def. Pain July 3, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
6. Title held up after disputed Hickerson vs. Brian Lee match November 14, 1988, in Memphis, TN
7. Brian Lee (def. Mike Miller in tournament finals November 19, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
8. Sid Vicious (def. Lee December 10, 1988, in Memphis, TN)

SOUTHERN TAG TEAM

1. Shawn Michaels & Marty Janetty (def. Mike Davis & Tommy Lane November 22, 1987, in Memphis, TN)
2. Title declared vacant when Michaels & Janetty won AWA tag team titles
3. Max Pain & Gary Young (won tournament February 1, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
4. Ron & Don Bruise (def. Pain & Young February 29, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
5. Max Pain & Gary Young (def. Bruise Brothers March 7, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
6. Ron & Don Bruise (def. Pain & Young March 28, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
7. Cuban Choir Boys (def. Bruise Brothers May 2, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
8. Billy Travis & Scott Steiner (def. Cuban Choir Boys May 29, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
9. Don Bass & Gary Young (def. Travis & Steiner June 6, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
10. Billy Travis & Scott Steiner (def. Bass & Young June 27, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
11. Mike Davis & Tommy Lane (def. Travis & Steiner August 15, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
12. Titles held up after Davis & Lane vs. Bill Dundee & Todd Morton match on October 20, 1988, in Lewisburg, TN)
13. Gary Young & Cactus Jack Foley (def. Dundee & Morton in tournament finals October 23, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
14. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden (def. Young & Foley November 7, 1988, in Memphis, TN)

WORLD CLASS CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

WCWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Al Perez (won title via forfeit when Kevin Von Erich failed to appear August 21, 1987, in Dallas, TX)
2. Kerry Von Erich (def. Perez March 6, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
3. Iceman King Parsons (def. Von Erich March 25, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
4. Kerry Von Erich (def. Parsons May 8, 1988, in Irving, TX)
5. Jerry Lawler (def. Von Erich October 23, 1988, in Memphis, TN--note Von Erich continued to defend title as champion in other cities after this date)
6. Kerry Von Erich (def. Lawler November 4, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
7. Tatsumi Fujinami (def. Von Erich December 9, 1988, in Tokyo, Japan)
8. Fujinami returned title to Von Erich because match was stopped via blood
9. Jerry Lawler (def. Von Erich December 13, 1988, in Chicago, IL to create unified AWA and WCWA champion)

TEXAS HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Matt Borne (def. Ted Arcidi in fictitious match November, 1987)
2. Terry Taylor (def. Borne February 26, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
3. Kevin Von Erich (won title via forfeit when Taylor failed to appear July 4, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
4. Iceman King Parsons (def. Kerry Von Erich who subbed for Kevin August 5, 1988, in Dallas, TX)

WCWA LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Eric Embry (def. Shaun Simpson December 25, 1987, in Dallas, TX)
2. Jeff Jarrett (def. Embry October 15, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
3. Eric Embry (def. Jarrett November 11, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
4. Jeff Jarrett (def. Embry November 24, 1988, in Jackson, TN)
5. Eric Embry (def. Jarrett December 13, 1988, in Chicago, IL)
6. Cactus Jack Manson (def. Embry December 30, 1988, in Dallas, TX)

WCWA TAG TEAM

1. Kevin & Kerry Von Erich (def. Frankie Lancaster & Brian Adias November 25, 1987, in Shreveport, LA)
2. Samoan Swat Team (def. Von Erichs August 12, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
3. Michael Hayes & Steve Cox (def. SST September 16, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
4. Samoan Swat Team (def. Hayes & Cox September 19, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
5. Michael Hayes & Steve Cox (def. SST October 15, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
6. Samoan Swat Team (def. Hayes & Cox October 17, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)

TEXAS TAG TEAM

1. Tony Atlas & Skip Young (won tournament June 29, 1987, in Fort Worth, TX)
2. John Tatum & Jack Victory (def. Young in handicap match when Atlas failed to appear January 5, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)
3. Titles held up after Tatum & Victory vs. Tommy Rogers & Bobby Fulton match on January 29, 1988, in Dallas, TX
4. John Tatum & Jack Victory (def. Rogers & Fulton via high card draw February 14, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)
5. Steve & Shaun Simpson (def. Tatum & Victory March 20, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)
6. John Tatum & Jack Victory (def. Simpsons April 8, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
7. Steve & Shaun Simpson (def. Tatum & Victory July 25, 1988, in Temple, TX)
8. Jimmy Jack Funk & John Tatum (def. Simpsons September 5, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)
9. Samoan Swat Team (def. Funk & Tatum to unify WCWA and Texas tag team titles September 12, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

AWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Curt Hennig (def. Nick Bockwinkel May 2, 1987, in San Francisco, CA)
2. Jerry Lawler (def. Hennig May 9, 1988, in Memphis, TN)

AWA INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION

1. Greg Gagne (def. Adrian Adonis in tournament final December 27, 1987, in Las Vegas, NV)
2. Ron Garvin (def. Gagne September 17, 1988, in Nashville, TN)
3. Title declared vacant because Garvin was leaving for WWF and wouldn't do a pinfall job to Gagne
4. Greg Gagne (def. Garvin via count out December 13, 1988, in Chicago, IL)

AWA WOMEN'S

1. Madusa Maceli (def. Candi Divine in tournament final December 27, 1988, in Las Vegas, NV)
2. Wendi Richter (def. Maceli November 26, 1988, in Bloomington, MN)

AWA TAG TEAM

1. Shawn Michaels & Marty Janetty (awarded titles by virtue of December 27, 1987, in Las Vegas, NV disputed decision vs. Randy Rose & Dennis Condrey when Rose & Condrey quit the promotion)
2. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond (def. Michaels & Janetty March 19, 1988, in Las Vegas, NV)

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Antonio Inoki (def. Dick Murdoch June 12, 1986, in Tokyo)
2. Inoki injured, title declared vacant
3. Tatsumi Fujinami (def. Big Van Vader to win title May 7, 1988, in Tokyo)
4. Title held up after Fujinami vs. Riki Choshu match on May 27, 1988, in Sendai)
5. Tatsumi Fujinami (def. Choshu June 24, 1988, in Osaka)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Hiroshi Hase (def. Kuniaki Kobayashi December 27, 1987, in Tokyo)
2. Owen Hart (def. Hase May 27, 1988, in Sendai)
3. Shiro Koshinaka (def. Hart June 24, 1988, in Osaka)

IWGP TAG TEAM

1. Yoshiaki Fujiwara & Kazuo Yamazaki (def. Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada September 1, 1987, in Fukuoka)
2. Tatsumi Fujinami & Kengo Kimura (def. Fujiwara & Yamazaki January 18, 1988, in Takuyama)
3. Riki Choshu & Masa Saito (def. Fujinami & Kimura June 10, 1988, in Hiroshima)

ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

PWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Stan Hansen (def. Hiroshi Wajima to win vacated title April 27, 1987, in Yokohama)
2. Genichiro Tenryu (def. Hansen March 9, 1988, in Yokohama)
3. Stan Hansen (def. Tenryu July 27, 1988, in Nagano)

INTERNATIONAL HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Stan Hansen October 21, 1986, in Tokyo)
2. Bruiser Brody (def. Tsuruta March 27, 1988, in Tokyo)
3. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Brody April 19, 1988, in Sendai)

UNITED NATIONAL HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Genichiro Tenryu (def. Ted DiBiase in tournament final April 26, 1986, in Omiya)
2. Stan Hansen (def. Tenryu July 27, 1988, in Nagano)

PWF JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Masa Fuchi (def. Kuniaki Kobayashi January 3, 1987, in Tokyo)

INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Road Warriors (def. Jumbo Tsuruta & Genichiro Tenryu March 12, 1987, in Tokyo)
2. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Road Warriors June 10, 1988, in Tokyo and titles then dropped as this was the unification of PWF and International tag team titles)

ALL-ASIAN TAG TEAM

1. Mighty Inoue & Takashi Ishikawa
2. Samson Fuyuki & Toshiaki Kawada (def. Inoue & Ishikawa March 9, 1988 in Yokohama)
3. Shunji Takano & Shinichi Nakano (def. Fuyuki & Kawada September 9, 1988 in Tokyo)
4. Samson Fuyuki & Toshiaki Kawada (def. Takano & Nakano September 15, 1988 in Tokyo)

PWF TAG TEAM

1. Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara (def. Stan Hansen & Austin Idol to win vacated titles September 3, 1987, in Nagoya)
2. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Tenryu & Hara June 4, 1988, in Sapporo)
3. Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy (def. Tsuruta & Yatsu July 29, 1988, in Takasaki)
4. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Hansen & Gordy July 31, 1988, in Hakodate)
5. Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara (def. Tsuruta & Yatsu August 29, 1988, in Tokyo)
6. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Tenryu & Hara August 30, 1988, in Osaka)
7. Tsuruta & Yatsu vacated titles after losing non-title match to Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy on November 30, 1988 in Takasaki
8. Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy (declared champions by virtue of winning annual World Tag Team tournament over Genichiro Tenryu & Toshiaki Kawada December 13, 1988 in Tokyo)

ALL JAPAN WOMEN

WWWA

1. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Yukari Omori October 20, 1987, in Tokyo)
2. Title declared vacant after August 25, 1988, match with Chigusa Nagayo vs. Lioness Asuka

JAPANESE

1. Bull Nakano
2. Yumi Ogura (def. Nakano January 28, 1988, in Nagoya)
3. Mika Komatsu (def. Ogura July 10, 1988, in Edmonton, ALTA)

WWWA TAG TEAM

1. Bull Nakano & Condor Saito (def. Yumi Ogura & Kazue Nagahori October 20, 1987, in Tokyo)
2. Titles declared vacant after Nakano & Saito vs. Yumiko Hotta & Mitsuko Nishiwaki match January 5, 1988, in Tokyo)
3. Bull Nakano & Kumiko Iwamoto (def. Hotta & Nishiwaki February 25, 1988, in Kawasaki)
4. Yumiko Hotta & Mitsuko Nishiwaki (def. Nakano & Iwamoto July 19, 1988, in Tokyo)
5. Yumi Ogura & Mika Komatsu (def. Hotta & Nishiwaki August 25, 1988, in Kawasaki)

ALL-PACIFIC

1. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Leilani Kai April 27, 1987, in Osaka)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

PACIFIC NORTHWEST HEAVYWEIGHT

1. The Grappler (def. Mike Miller October 31, 1987, in Portland, OR)
2. Scott Peterson (def. Grappler August 5, 1988, in Eugene, OR)
3. The Grappler (def. Peterson September 8, 1988, in Newport, OR)
4. Top Gun (def. Grappler October 3, 1988, in Longview, WA)
5. The Grappler (won title in fictitious match from Top Gun)
6. Tatsumi Fujinami (declared champion when Grappler failed to beat him in 30 minutes on October 15, 1988, in Portland, OR)
7. The Grappler (def. Fujinami December 10, 1988, in Portland, OR)
8. Top Gun (def. The Grappler December 25, 1988 in Portland, OR)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST TAG TEAM

1. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Super Ninja & Joey Jackson November 27, 1987, in Portland, OR)
2. Mike Golden & Avalanche (def. Doll & Peterson March 26, 1988, in Portland, OR)
3. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Golden & Avalanche May 7, 1988, in Portland, OR)
4. The Grappler & The Terminator (def. Doll & Peterson July 2, 1988, in Portland, OR)
5. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Grappler & Terminator July 9, 1988, in Portland, OR)
6. Titles declared vacant after Doll & Peterson vs. Buddy Rose & Col. DeBeers match July 16, 1988, in Portland, OR)
7. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Rose & DeBeers July 22, 1988, in Eugene, OR)
8. Buddy Rose & Avalanche (def. Doll & Peterson September 3, 1988, in Portland, OR)
9. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Rose & Avalanche September 20, 1988, in Portland, OR)
10. Abbuda Dein & The Grappler (def. Doll & Peterson October 29, 1988, in Portland, OR)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST TELEVISION

1. Abbuda Dein (def. Art Barr December 26, 1987, in Portland, OR)
2. Title declared vacant after Dein vs. Cocoa Samoa match January 30, 1988, in Portland, OR
3. The Assassin (won Battle Royal for title February 16, 1988, in Portland, OR)
4. Title declared vacant when Assassin lost loser leaves town match
5. Col DeBeers (def. Steve Doll in tournament final August 16, 1988, in Portland, OR)
6. DeBeers stripped of title for failure to defend in 30 days
7. Al Madril (won tournament October 9, 1988, in Finley, WA)
8. Top Gun (def. Madril October 29, 1988, in Portland, OR)

STAMPEDE WRESTLING

NORTH AMERICAN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Owen Hart (def. Makhan Singh April 10, 1987, in Calgary, ALTA)
2. Makhan Singh (def. Hart May 6, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
3. Don Muraco (def. Singh December 9, 1988, in Medicine Hat, ALTA)

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH MIDHEAVYWEIGHT

1. Great Gama (def. Owen Hart August 7, 1987, in Calgary, ALTA)
2. Chris Benoit (def. Gama March 18, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
3. Johnny Smith (def. Benoit June 10, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
4. Chris Benoit (def. Smith June 17, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
5. Johnny Smith (def. Benoit June 24, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)

INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Bruce Hart & Brian Pillman (def. Makhan Singh & Jerry Morrow to win vacated titles November 13, 1987, in Calgary, ALTA)
2. Cuban Assassin & Jerry Morrow (def. Hart & Pillman July 22, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
3. Chris Benoit & Lance Idol (def. Assassin & Morrow October 7, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
4. Cuban Assassin & Jerry Morrow (def. Benoit & Idol October 28, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
5. Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith (def. Assassin & Morrow December 7, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
6. Makhan Singh & Gary Allbright (def. Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith December 30, 1988 in Calgary, ALTA)

CONTINENTAL WRESTLING FEDERATION

CONTINENTAL HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Dutch Mantell (def. Wendell Cooley in tournament final October 30, 1987, in Knoxville, TN)
2. Title declared vacant for CWF tournament

ALABAMA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Tom Prichard (def. Tony Anthony October 20, 1987, in Birmingham, AL)
2. Moondog Spot (def. Prichard January 3, 1988, in Montgomery, AL)
3. Ranger Ross (def. Spot in fictitious match, January, 1988)
4. Jonathan Boyd (def. Ross January 11, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
5. Tom Prichard (def. Boyd February 15, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
6. Tony Anthony (def. Prichard March 28, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
7. Title declared vacant for CWF tournament

SOUTHEASTERN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Lord Humongous (def. Danny Davis December 25, 1987, in Knoxville, TN)
2. Title declared vacant for CWF tournament

CWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Tom Prichard (def. Tony Anthony in tournament final October 3, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)

U.S. JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Larry Hamilton (def. Scott Armstrong September 7, 1987, in Birmingham, AL)
2. Ken Wayne (given title when Hamilton left area)
3. Danny Davis (def. Wayne August 8, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
4. Ken Wayne (def. Davis August 8, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
5. Danny Davis (def. Wayne September 13, 1988, in Montgomery, AL)
6. Ken Wayne (def. Davis October 1, 1988, in Dothan, AL)
7. Danny Davis (given title when Wayne left area)

CWF TAG TEAM

1. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden (def. Jerry Stubbs & Tony Anthony April 27, 1987, in Birmingham, AL)
2. Tracy Smothers & Steve Armstrong (def. Fuller & Golden March 5, 1988, in Dothan, AL)
3. Danny Davis & Ken Wayne (def. Smothers & Armstrong May 22, 1988, in Montgomery, AL)
4. Detroit Demolition & D.I. Bob Carter (def. Davis & Wayne May 29, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
5. Lord Humongous & Shane Douglas (def. Carter & Pvt. Mark Pyle who subbed for injured Detroit Demolition July 18, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
6. Jerry Stubbs & Tony Anthony (given titles when Douglas left area)
7. Titles declared vacant after Stubbs & Anthony vs. Humongous & Tim Horner match
8. Jerry Stubbs & Tony Anthony (won tournament beating The Bullet & Brad Armstrong November 11, 1988, in Knoxville, TN)
9. The Bullet & Brad Armstrong (def. Stubbs & Anthony November 28, 1988, in Montgomery, AL)
10. Jerry Stubbs & Tony Anthony (def. The Bullet & Brad Armstrong December 25, 1988, in Knoxville, TN)

WORLD WRestling COUNCIL

UNIVERSAL

1. Carlos Colon (def. Hercules Ayala September 20, 1987, in San Juan)
2. Hercules Ayala (def. Colon February 13, 1988, in Caguas)
3. Carlos Colon (def. Ayala April 9, 1988, in Caguas)
4. Hercules Ayala (def. Colon July 23, 1988, in Arecibo)
5. Ayala stripped of championship
6. Ron Garvin (def. Colon in tournament final November 24, 1988, in Bayamon)
7. Carlos Colon (def. Garvin December 18, 1988, in San Juan)

PUERTO RICAN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Kareem Muhammad (def. Mighty Igor June 6, 1987, in Guaynabo)
2. Miguelito Perez (def. Muhammad January 6, 1988, in San Juan)
3. Super Black Ninja (def. Perez May 21, 1988, in Carolina)
4. Ricky Santana (def. Ninja August 6, 1988, in San Juan)
5. Bobby Jagers (def. Santana)
6. Ricky Santana (def. Jagers)
7. Hercules Ayala (def. Santana December 17, 1988, in Bayamon)

CARIBBEAN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Hercules Ayala
2. TNT (def. Ayala June 18, 1988, in San Juan)
3. Buddy Landel (def. TNT August 13, 1988, in Bayamon)
4. TNT (def. Landel September 17, 1988, in Caguas)
5. Jason the Terrible (def. TNT November 11, 1988, in Carolina)

WWC JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Hurricane Castillo Jr. (def. El Gran Mendoza September 20, 1987, in San Juan)
2. Tony Falk (def. Castillo April 6, 1988, in Catano)
3. Invader #3 (def. Falk April 23, 1988, in Guaynabo)
4. El Profe (def. Invader #3 November 16, 1988, in Catano)

WWC TAG TEAM

1. Kendo Nagasaki & Mr. Pogo (def. Mark & Chris Youngblood October 17, 1987, in Caguas)
2. The Invaders (def. Nagasaki & Pogo (January 6, 1988, in San Juan)
3. Kendo Nagasaki & Mr. Pogo (def. Invaders January 16, 1988, in Guaynabo)
4. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Nagasaki & Pogo May 14, 1988, in Caguas)
5. Kendo Nagasaki & Mr. Pogo (given titles when Youngbloods left promotion in wake of Bruiser Brody's murder)
6. Bart & Brad Batten (def. Nagasaki & Pogo August 6, 1988, in San Juan)
7. Ron & Chicky Starr (def. Battens October 16, 1988, in Agadilla)
8. Bart & Brad Batten (def. Starrs November 12, 1988, in Caguas)

CARIBBEAN TAG TEAM

1. Mark & Chris Youngblood
2. Bobby Jagers & Dan Kroffatt (def. Youngbloods February 6, 1988, in Guaynabo)
3. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Jagers & Kroffatt April 23, 1988, in Guaynabo)
4. Bobby Jagers & Dan Kroffatt (def. Youngbloods June 11, 1988, in Caguas)
5. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez (def. Jagers & Kroffatt September 10, 1988, in Bayamon)

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE BEST

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR - AKIRA MAEDA

On the back of the ring jackets worn by several wrestlers for the All Japan promotion, it says, "Revolution, We all Want to change the world."

While the saying, which originally comes from a popular song by The Beatles some two decades ago, is best known as the trademark for Genichiro Tenryu, there is no wrestler in the business that it would better fit than Akira Maeda.

Over the past five years, Maeda has been one of the most controversial wrestlers in the business. His legendary headstrong attitude, a series of in-ring and outside-the-ring confrontations, a "shooter" reputation, which critics claim is as much hype as reality, have let to his unique reputation and perception within the business. But in the last year, Maeda has gone from the "bad-boy" who could have been the superstar of Japan if he'd only played along, to the wrestler who is the superstar of Japan, and it's because the fans feel he didn't play along.

While the "shoot-kick" on Riki Choshu on November 19 at Tokyo's Korauken Hall may be looked back upon as the single biggest event which led to the creation of the Maeda-legend, it really goes back farther than that.

Maeda, born January 24, 1959, was originally a karate fighter based in Osaka. Born of Korean descent, he was discovered by Hisashi Shinma, then the brains behind the powerful New Japan Pro Wrestling Company, while competing in a karate tournament at the age of 18. At 6-foot-3, Maeda was relatively tall for Japanese. After early training, Shinma felt that a decade or so down the line that young Maeda would replace Antonio Inoki as the kingpin of Japanese wrestling.

To groom his protege, Maeda was sent to Florida to train under legendary wrestler Karl Gotch, and to learn both professional and legitimate submission wrestling under the man some would claim was the all-time toughest of the modern pro wrestlers. He was then sent to England for seasoning, using the ring name Kwik-Kik-Lee, a name given for his fast kicking ability and billed as the cousin of Sammy Lee (Satoru Sayama), who had made a tremendous hit years earlier in England.

In December of 1981, Maeda captured England's version of the World heavyweight championship from Wayne Bridges, and at that point, Shinma started planning Maeda's return to Japan.

With much publicity based upon his win of what was billed in Japan as the European heavyweight title, the debut of Maeda the new superstar was set for April of 1982 at the Tokyo Sumo Hall, in the midst of the apex of the New Japan company where sellouts nightly were the rule. Unfortunately for Maeda, he had to share billing on his first night in, for his title defense against Paul Orndorff, with three other main events which had even more interest--a loser leaves town match with Antonio Inoki against Masa Saito, an International title match with Tatsumi Fujinami against Riki Choshu (this famous feud was at its peak at this point), and if that wasn't enough, Sayama, wrestling as the original Tiger Mask, had a

match for the vacant junior heavyweight title against Dynamite Kid (which some would say today is one of the great matches of all-time).

While Maeda pinned Orndorff in his debut using a belly-to-belly suplex with a bridge in just four minutes and got a nice reception, he was too inexperienced to stand out amongst all the great talent New Japan had. While he was given a push and was one of the stars of Japan, he never got "over" to the degree either he or Shinma expected.

Even then, Maeda had a weakness is working against Americans. However, he did have many outstanding matches matched up with the Japanese, and gained a following for his wrestling technique.

But the superstardom both he and the promotion expected didn't occur right away. When Shinma was ousted in a promotional struggle in late 1983, Maeda's status had become just one of literally a dozen young stars vying for top spots on the card, but his popularity was not even in the same level as the big stars.

Frustrated with his apparent career stagnation, Maeda was the first wrestler to jump when Shinma formed the Universal Wrestling Federation in early 1984. Shinma's original idea was to bring Maeda in as the protege and No. 2 wrestler behind Antonio Inoki, and groom Maeda to eventually take over as the top star in Japan. However, Inoki didn't go to the UWF as Shinma expected, and Shinma was forced to build the group around Maeda.

In order to give Maeda "credibility" in the eyes of the Japanese fans, Shinma arranged a tour for him with the World Wrestling Federation in the Spring of 1984, the first year of the group's national expansion. Maeda "won" what was billed as the WWF International championship in Madison Square Garden from Pierre LeFebvre, a preliminary wrestler brought in from Montreal when the agreed-on opponent, Dino Bravo, somehow fell through. But while the tour was going on, relations between Shinma and Vince McMahon Jr. must have worsened because suddenly, Maeda's "push" was over before it began, and the remainder of the tour consisted of him doing jobs for the likes of Rene Goulet and George Steele.

Maeda returned to Japan with a bad attitude about American wrestlers and American wrestling and at this point had his own Vision Quest of turning pro wrestling into a "sport" that the showmen who he had to do jobs for would be completely out of place in.

Shinma, however, still wanted to promote traditional pro wrestling. Shinma eventually lost control of and had to depart from the company he formed shortly after Sayama, who had retired from pro wrestling a year earlier, agreed to come out of retirement to bolster the UWF's sagging fortunes. Sayama worked two shows in Tokyo which not only sold out easily, but gave the new promotion much-needed publicity and credibility

among the average wrestling fans. Sayama then adopted and he-goes-or-I-go stand with Shinma, and the remainder of the company felt Sayama was more important to their long-term survival and popularity and out went Shinma.

This left the wrestlers, mainly Sayama, Maeda and Yoshiaki Fujiwara in control of the creative direction of the company, where the controversial "style change" began. Sayama and Maeda both had been bitter from their past treatment in the business, and wanted to change wrestling into something everyone would believe was real. To that extent, Maeda, the most outspoken publicly of the group, routinely would tell reporters that the UWF's wrestling was real and the other groups practiced fake wrestling, which immediately made him the most controversial wrestler in Japan. He used to routinely challenge Tsumi Fujinami of New Japan, who was well respected by the serious fans as the best of the Japanese wrestlers. When the name Antonio Inoki or Giant Baba came up, still the most well-known and famous wrestlers in Japan, he was just laugh at the mention, the ultimate insult, rather than respond. He was particularly critical of the American wrestlers, although he had high praise for some, like Bob Orton Jr.

By the end of 1984, the UWF, without any television exposure, had achieved a cult popularity, particularly in Tokyo. However its spot shows in the smaller cities didn't draw well, nor did fans in the smaller cities understand the style, based on unspectacular looking submission holds and sambo wrestling moves along with spectacular kicks.

Maeda was not the big star of the UWF. That honor went to Sayama. He was not considered by the hardcore supporters as the "shooter" of the group either. That was Fujiwara. However, Maeda was the rebellious spirit of the UWF. Both internal and external problems doomed the promotion in 1985, even though its shows routinely sold out in Tokyo well in advance because the promotion had the most brutal and realistic looking wrestling style of this era. Sayama and Maeda had a falling out over style differences. Sayama, a former professional kick boxer, wanted the kicks to be sold as the "supreme" moves and wanted the style to turn into kick boxing with some wrestling moves thrown in. Maeda wanted to keep the kicks, but wanted to make the submission wrestling moves the "supreme" moves and turn the sport/exhibition into a style that was somewhat the brainchild of Gotch. After an in-ring confrontation between Maeda and Sayama got out of hand, Sayama quit the group and retired from wrestling, and the group folded up almost immediately.

The rest of the UWF crew rejoined New Japan and there was immediate public clamor for Inoki to wrestle Maeda. The New Japan supporters wanted their hero to shut Inoki up, and the "UWF maniacs," who started attending New Japan cards en masse, particularly in Tokyo, waited for the day that Maeda would show Inoki for what he really was.

In early February, after Inoki beat the UWF's ace Fujiwara, the big angle was set up as Maeda ran in and kicked Inoki in the throat and the place went crazy. The match was announced for March, and the 9,000 tickets and \$280,000 house sold out in one day, the first indication of Maeda's potential drawing power. But problems arose when Maeda, in order to save face for his fans, refused to do a job under any circumstances for Inoki, and Inoki refused a

compromise finish, and a 10-man tag team match with Inoki and Maeda involved was changed to the main event.

The two never faced one another during the match and avoided each other in the ring for several months, despite the heat and box office power the confrontation promised.

There were also problems in the ring. While Maeda's matches with the Japanese wrestlers were excellent for the most part, his frequent matches with Americans were hardly that. Maeda's reputation and comments about American wrestling became known to those who toured Japan, plus New Japan booked tough guys like street fighter Dick Murdoch and amateur wrestling star Nick Kiniski, and between Maeda's reputation and language problems, the matches were often not quite so good. Some of the Americans claimed Maeda couldn't back up his shooter reputation.

There were plenty of strange matches in 1986. One match at Korauken Hall against Kerry Von Erich infuriated Maeda's fans. Von Erich had no "tough-guy" reputation among the UWF fans, who sold out the former home field of the UWF, and Maeda was "expected" by the UWF maniacs to humiliate the big-name American. While Maeda got in his expected flurries, the fans stormed out of the building, with three matches remaining in the card, after the double count out finish.

Another match with Andre the Giant is now infamous in Japan wrestling circles. Whether Andre himself went in with the idea of humiliating Maeda, or the other Americans told him to, or it was the New Japan office itself trying to take Maeda down a peg, isn't clear, although Maeda's supporters "credited" the plot to the New Japan office. Andre stood in the ring and laughed as Maeda applied all his sambo wrestling submission moves. He was making fun of Maeda and of his shooter rep and shooter style. Maeda then started throwing work kicks at Andre, who acted like they were slightly less devastating than a mosquito bite and kept laughing. Things began to break loose at this point. Maeda started throwing harder and harder kicks at Andre's knee, then would back up, in a fighting stance, and was too quick for Andre to retaliate. Maeda then went to Kantaro Hoshino, one of the New Japan wrestlers with seniority and asked if he could go all out, but Hoshino turned his back and ignored the question. Maeda kept kicking the knee hard, and the knee turned a bright red, although Andre, immobile by this time, still maintained his footing. Maeda then started using a quick single-leg, probably the first time anyone had ever attempted to actually "wrestle" Andre, but the Giant's balance was so poor at this point and his conditioning so poor, that he went down with ease. Three more times Maeda easily took Andre down with single-legs, but because of Andre's size and uncertainty about what was going on, never got close enough for long enough for Andre to get a hold of him after making his fast move. After a few take downs and the struggle it was just for Andre to get up, Andre finally just laid there and dared Maeda to attack him. Maeda began kicking furiously at Andre's knee before Inoki came to ringside and called off the fiasco, which was never allowed to air on television.

Maeda's most famous match occurred in November, on the under card to the Inoki vs. Leon Spinks fiasco which drew a remarkable 28.9 television rating and a then-pro-wrestling record \$837,000 house. While Inoki and Spinks stunk out the Sumo Hall to the extent a mini-riot occurred, Maeda and World Karate Association cruiser weight champion Don Nakaya Neilsen had what many consider the greatest mixed match in martial arts history, with Maeda winning via submission in the fifth round. While the match itself was a work, and Maeda actually received a concussion from a punch in the first round, it only served to make his shooter reputation more powerful.

By December, Inoki and Maeda had settled some of their differences and worked together in a few tag team matches.

Maeda's influence in 1986 made New Japan wrestling even more serious than it had been. He was voted Wrestler of the year in Japan and his match with Fujinami was voted Match of the year and held the IWGP tag team title with Osamu Kido. However, despite the television ratings for the Spinks fight, New Japan's television numbers fell and the hierarchy believed that Maeda's style wasn't easily enough understood to attract the general public, and the decision was made to lessen his influence in 1987.

Maeda had an uneventful 1987. He captured the promotion's tag team title with Nobuhiko Takada as partner. He even did a clean job for American wrestler Bam Bam Bigelow, who was getting a huge build-up as the new foreign superstar. The long-awaited singles match with Inoki still never came. He was plagued by injuries. When Riki Choshu and a dozen others jumped from All Japan to New Japan in the middle of the year, Maeda's spot as the rebellious hero was taken by Choshu. Still, in Tokyo, and particularly in Korauken Hall, Maeda remained with his popularity intact. He suffered a broken breastbone when fellow UWF star Kazuo Yamazaki kicked him hard in the chest, and surgery was required which kept him out of action. He later injured his back upon his return.

In the beginning stages of New Japan's annual tag team tournament, with Maeda returning from his back injury, a six-man tag match was held in Tokyo's Korauken Hall with Maeda teaming with Kido and Takada against Choshu, Masa Saito and Hiro Saito. Rumors had already spread before-hand that something was going down and the place was packed with UWF maniacs. Things between Choshu and Maeda got tense quickly. There were the hard slaps, which is actually typical of the way Japanese wrestlers work in heating the crowd, but both started mimicking and making faces, which was atypical. They worked with each other, but the tensions were high. At one point Choshu refused to go down when Maeda leg-tripped him, and Choshu with his legit balance, stayed on one foot and wouldn't let Maeda take him down. Finally, Choshu had the scorpion death lock on Kido when Maeda jumped into the ring to make the save with a kick, but this was no pro wrestling kick. From the blind-side, Maeda kicked Choshu in the eye with enough force to break two bones in Choshu's eye. The eye, and in fact the entire side of Choshu's face, immediately swelled up and the eye shut and blood came down. The maniacs in the crowd went wild. Things nearly got totally out of hand with Maeda daring Choshu to do something about it, but Saito kept the clear head

and kept things together. Choshu immediately pinned Takada to end the match.

Maeda was suspended the next day, which became major news in Japan. The word spread in the press, and soon, most everyone in Japan, not just the wrestling fans, knew of Maeda and knew that while pro wrestling may not be real, that one kick was real.

A cowardly act became a heroic act in the public's mind. Instead of being the man who violated the very basics of what pro wrestling is, the public saw him as the man who dared to fight for real and was kicked out because of it.

But there was too much at stake, money-wise, for New Japan not to bring Maeda back. A potential rematch in singles against Choshu had the potential to literally draw a million dollars and you don't turn down that kind of business.

But punishment had to be meted out, to prevent such an occurrence from happening again. New Japan first wanted Maeda to tour the United States as punishment, or at least Mexico. Maeda refused. New Japan then was going to allow Maeda to return, but he would have his pay cut 15 percent and would have to agree to do a job for both Choshu and Inoki. He refused again.

In March, rumors started forming that Maeda would reform the UWF. Many reporters realized that was the case when on the final card of the March series, Kazuo Yamazaki and Kuniaki Kobayashi got into a legit brawl on the under card, and it was quickly realized Yamazaki started it since he knew it was his last night with the promotion. The UWF announced at a press conference two weeks later that it was starting up operations and nine months later, Maeda is the key player in the Japanese wrestling scene.

HULK HOGAN - BEST BABY FACE

When the subject of professional wrestling comes up, the first name out of most people's lips is ol' Thunderlips himself, Hulk Hogan.

The Hulk Hogan phenomenon, and it wouldn't do it justice to call it anything less than that, is a product of several things. Some credit it purely to the marketing expertise of Vince McMahon. Some credit it to Sylvester Stallone. Some credit it with being in the right place at the right time. Some don't even credit it.

The truth of the matter is that Vince McMahon didn't create Hulk Hogan. Neither did Sylvester Stallone. Verne Gagne may claim credit for it, but the truth is, as most great acts and great angles, a whole bunch of things simply fell into place.

The Hogan phenomenon started on a regional basis in the AWA in 1981, when, brought in as a heel, managed by Johnny Valiant, to duplicate the role he played for a year in the WWF, the fans suddenly started cheering him. The AWA took notice, turned him baby face, dumped Valiant, and had its three biggest years in its history.

But so many things about Hogan's life, like the story that Hogan was a journeyman heel before

McMahon came up with the brilliant premise of turning him baby face and creating this phenomenon, are closer to literary fiction than anything else.

Hogan was born Terry Gene Bollea on August 11, 1953 and grew up in the Tampa Bay area. While always large, he was not an athlete in school, and in fact his last true athletic competition probably was Little League baseball. He attended Robinson High School in Tampa at about the same time Mike Graham, Steve Keirn, Austin Idol and Dick Slater did, although all predated his entrance into pro wrestling by a number of years.

While his classmates were making a name from themselves in pro wrestling, Bollea became an avid weight lifter and built himself up to around 275 pounds of muscle on a 6-foot-5 frame.

Nicknamed "Whitey," because of his hair color, which apparently was that shade long before pro wrestling, Bollea played bass guitar a little but was well known in the Tampa area as a humongous bouncer at bars and in the gyms for his legitimate strength.

There are several stories as to what brought wrestling and Hulk Hogan together. Hogan claims he was working as a bank teller and saw the size checks the wrestlers were bringing in. Most claim it actually started at a bar he was bouncing in, when he met, and had to throw out Jack Brisco, the former NWA World champion who was also an NCAA champion wrestler.

Shortly thereafter, Bollea was being trained by Hiro Matsuda out of Tampa, who was responsible for many of the Florida wrestlers getting started. Legend has it that Matsuda used to bully his pupils to teach them respect, but never tried with Bollea because of his size.

Bollea started pro wrestling in 1978 using the ring name, Terry "The Hulk" Boulder, bouncing around the smaller Southern circuits. Shortly after his debut, he was joined as a tag team partner by wrestling "brother" Eddie Boulder, who now wrestles as Brutus Beefcake. Although the two had a resemblance, apparently they weren't brothers in real life, although they were weight lifting buddies dating back to the Tampa days.

Bollea later worked as Sterling Golden in Georgia, and although quite green in the ring, got a decent push because of his size and physique, which at the time, was quite out of the ordinary in the wrestling business.

"The Incredible" Hulk Hogan was born in late 1979. He was another in the long line of oversized heels brought into New York by Vince McMahon Sr. to challenge then-WWF champion Bob Backlund. But this one was treated differently. In an area built around large, beefy challengers, Hogan, billed at 6-foot-9 and 330 pounds, was bigger than most, save an Ernie Ladd, and more muscular than any. He wasn't the most skilled wrestler around, but, with the exception of Bruiser Brody, none of the big wrestlers of that era were.

The magazines loved him. He gained a cult following of fans, although he was a heel. He was brought along more slowly than most monsters, and only given a few matches with Backlund, and none

at the much-publicized Madison Square Garden shows.

Hogan's first big national angle wasn't until the summer of 1980 with Andre the Giant, when on a television match, Hogan body slammed the Giant and gave him a clothesline with a loaded elbow pad. It was one of the first times Andre had done an angle, and led to rematches around the country. The first Andre-Hogan match in New York was the semifinal to the Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko match at Shea Stadium which drew pro wrestling's second largest paid crowd up to that point, 35,771 fans and its largest gate, some \$541,730. The Andre-Hogan matches spread not only around the WWF circuit, but also had chapters in cities like Atlanta, Los Angeles, Toronto and Tokyo.

It was while wrestling in New York that the contact was made for Hogan to appear as a big wrestler in the movie, Rocky III. Legend has it that Sylvester Stallone was just switching television stations one night and happened to come upon wrestling (he couldn't admit to watching it, mind you, because that was in the days were celebrities, with the exception of Andy Kaufman, wouldn't admit to vices of the like, even though Stallone had actually done a movie with wrestlers and about wrestling just a few years earlier) and lo and behold he saw this guy who he had to get for the movie. At least that's what Stallone said on Carson. Hogan's version was he was wrestling at the Garden, got a note that Stallone wanted him for the Rocky movie, thought it was a joke, crumbled it up, and went to Japan.

Actually the role was set well in advance and it was John Studd who was slated for it, but upon reconsidering, Hogan's physique was felt would look better, and to add size, lifts were put in Hogan's boots in certain scenes (not that Hogan needed them to tower over the 5-foot-8 inch Stallone).

Many gave the Rocky movie credit for Hogan's eventual success in wrestling, but that would ignore the fact that Hogan had turned into the biggest drawing baby face the AWA had ever seen well before the Rocky movie was ever released. While the movie may have given him a slight bit of extra name recognition when he returned to New York in 1984, if the movie hadn't have come along, the course of wrestling history wouldn't have been changed one iota.

Even before the AWA stint, the first real celebrity status Hogan enjoyed was in Japan, almost immediately from his first tour in May of 1980. Hogan's look was almost perfect to make it in Japan. He was just what the promoters wanted out of an American: big, muscular, tanned and blonde. He recorded a record album in Japan (for trivia notes, many of the songs on the album were written by Jimmy Hart), had the dolls, comics and the like and was one of the five most popular foreign stars in the Orient.

The Rocky movie came out in the spring of 1982, by which time Hogan was selling out the St. Paul Civic Center, Denver, Winnipeg, Chicago and many other AWA cities with regularity. In between, he made his big money by touring

Japan. New York may have been ignorant of Hulkamania, but it was already the biggest thing in the wrestling business.

He kept up that schedule for two years, and while in Japan in November of 1983, came the shot which started the wrestling war.

Hogan was teaming with Antonio Inoki and en route to winning the annual tag team tournament for the second year in succession when Vince McMahon Sr., on the same tour traveling with Andre the Giant, signed him up to return to the WWF and apparently the promise of him being made World champion, something he had often wanted from Verne Gagne but was continually rebuffed, and a reported promise of an unheard of contract by the standards of those days (rumored being between \$250,000 and \$400,000) caused Hogan to make the jump and served warning on pro wrestling that McMahon was going to promote in opposition to the established groups, and use Hogan, Roddy Piper and the rest of the big name stars against the groups they had achieved earlier fame in.

At about the same time, Hogan got married, then captured the WWF title, and the WWF followed by expanding nationwide, and later internationally.

Cross-over celebrity-hood came in early 1985, through the exploits of then-rock sensation Cyndi Lauper, Lou Albano, Roddy Piper, David Wolfe and Mr. T, all being maneuvered behind-the-scenes by McMahon. The first Wrestlemania, with Hogan & Mr. T teaming up against Roddy Piper & Paul Orndorff was the most publicized pro wrestling event ever in North America and later a best-selling videocassette.

Hogan became the biggest drawing card pro wrestling had ever seen in North America. He was the best-known wrestler since Gorgeous George and became the first U.S. wrestler since the early television era of the late 40s to not only be well-known among wrestling fans nationally, but also have genuine name recognition among non-wrestling fans. He is reputed to be the first and only pro wrestler to ever earn more than \$1 million in a calendar year. Just as impressive is that four years later, with the wrestling boom over and arenas no longer selling out, it is Hogan who is the lone super draw left in the business on these shores. In any major entertainment field, a run of seven years by any individual act as the top dollar drawer in an industry, particularly one as turbulent as pro wrestling, is just like the name says, "Incredible."

Of course no story about Hogan would be complete without mentioning the other side of the story, Hogan's wrestling ability, or lack thereof.

Some have called Hogan the archetype of the American lazy pro wrestling style. Some have blamed his popularity with changing the upper echelon of wrestling from legitimate athletes to bloated non-athlete bodybuilder and steroid user types. Many former wrestlers decry his ability and in fact, to emphasize the point, legendary wrestler Lou Thesz, in his early 70s, has claimed on more than one occasion that even today he could beat Hogan in a true wrestling match.

While Hogan may be the most famous wrestler who was neither a great worker nor a great legitimate

wrestler, he isn't the only wrestler who lacked in these categories that became famous. And by no means should he go down in any history books as the least deserving World champion of all-time, but neither should he be confused with being a great worker or a great wrestler.

At 35, with a one-year-old daughter, and a big-screen movie to be released next year, the question comes up as to what is in the future for Hogan.

Those who know him don't expect him to be out of wrestling in the near future. He can certainly afford to walk away, and the job of being Hulk Hogan, with the mega doses of sun rays and stress and strain of maintaining the physique is hardly healthy. But Hogan appears to be addicted, as most performers are, to the spotlight, and he's got plenty of time left before the spotlight passes him by.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS & JIM CORNETTE - TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR, BEST INTERVIEWS AND BEST MANAGER

Professional wrestling is a business built around muscle heads, giants, pretty-boys and ferocious beasts.

It's hardly a place where one would expect that its awards would be dominated by an ex-photographer, an ex-lifeguard, and a guy who used to haul the ring around.

But that's the background of Jim Cornette, Stan Lane and Bobby Eaton, the Midnight Express.

Cornette, the consensus choice for the best manager of this era and arguably the best ever, is someone who has been eating, sleeping and drinking pro wrestling for as long as those who know him can remember.

Before getting into wrestling he was a photographer for wrestling magazines both in the U.S. and Japan. He did the programs and ran the concession stands in Louisville. He did some ring announcing. He read all the magazines, subscribed to the newsletters, attended the fan club conventions, and after all that, broke into the performance side of the business. Along with childhood friend Norman "The Weasel" Dooley, he was co-inventor of the star system for rating matches.

Cornette, the non-stop talker, compliments his stable mate, Bobby Eaton, who rarely talks.

Eaton, also, is a life-long fan of pro wrestling, who broke in as a teenager, was probably the most underrated performer in the business for years, and paired with Cornette's mouth and with former partner Dennis Condrey and current partner Stan Lane, has been half of the tag team of the year for three years running.

The third member of the trio, Stan Lane, had a different background. A martial arts enthusiast, Lane met Ric Flair while a lifeguard in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and broke into pro wrestling on the independent circuits shortly thereafter.

High-flying Bobby Eaton was born August 14, 1958 and hails from Huntsville, Alabama. He was a hanger-on from early on, first driving the ring around and helping put up the ring for Nick Gulas. Later, while still a teenager, he was trained by Tojo Yamamoto and tagged up with George Gulas, who had the ability of something less than a typical promoter's son. The two were called the "Jet Set," and Eaton mainly bounced around, and bumped around, the Southern circuits for nearly a decade. Because of his ability to take great bumps, mainly worked as a heel but was held back because he wasn't strong on interviews, and often had a manager.

The big break came in late 1983 when Bill Dundee, who is Eaton's father-in-law, left Tennessee to work for Bill Watts' Mid South Sports and turned the territory on its ear. While most credit baby face imports like the Rock & Roll Express and Terry Taylor, along with Dundee's booking, for turning Watts' promotion into one of the best in the land, the work of the Midnight Express can't be ignored.

The Express at the time consisted of Eaton with partner Dennis Condrey, another good working journeyman type heel who mainly worked the Southern circuits. Condrey, who could do a decent interview, was held back because he was generally colorless, despite having a good reputation inside the ring.

Jim Cornette, born September 17, 1961 in Louisville, also used to be a hanger-on. He was an avid photographer from grade school, and ran the concession stands and did magazine photography as a teenager. His life-long goal of getting into pro wrestling occurred in 1982, when he became Jimmy Hart's understudy working for Jarrett Promotions in Tennessee and Kentucky. But even though he was a good manager from early on, he had no reputation in the business until Dundee brought him to Mid South.

The Midnight Express & Jim Cornette were among many reasons why Mid South wrestling had its biggest year ever in 1984, first with their "Last Stampede" series against Bill Watts & Stagger Lee (Junkyard Dog) and later with the first round of their feuds with both the Rock & Roll Express and The Fantastics. Soon after came a six-month stint in Dallas, and by the summer of 1985, just as Mid South wanted them back, Jim Crockett came in with an offer to put them on national television.

Another team that came into Crockett's promotion at about the same time was the Rock & Roll, and by 1986 the two teams were constant foes, bouncing the NWA tag team titles back-and-forth and having top-calibre matches regularly.

The break-up with Condrey, which resulted 18 months later in the Midnight Express vs. Midnight Express pro wrestling feud in the NWA, came for a variety of reasons. Condrey suddenly disappeared and no-showed about two weeks at a time, reportedly without any word. Cornette was told to get a new partner when it became obvious Condrey wasn't coming back, and the choice came down to either Stan Lane or Tom Prichard, and somehow Lane answered the phone first.

Condrey has since claimed that the break-up was because the three received an offer from Titan Sports, and that Cornette and Eaton voted against him, two-to-one, on accepting the offer.

Enter Breck Stansfield Lane, born August 5, 1953, former lifeguard, karate instructor and all-around party guy.

Ric Flair's only protege active in pro wrestling, Lane worked under the name Stan Flair early, and later as "Nature Boy" Stanley Lane in Texas and Florida. He held the Florida tag team titles in 1979 with partner Bryan St. John, feuding with the Brisco brothers among others, wrestled in Georgia in 1980, coincidentally often teaming with Condrey, before heading to Tennessee.

Lane was a heel, managed by Jimmy Hart, turned baby face in 1982 and soon thereafter, became billed as the protege of area legend Jackie Fargo, teaming with Steve Keirn as "The Fabulous Ones," one of the first of the group of Rock & Roll tag teams aimed as teenaged girls.

Lane & Keirn set the Jarrett promotion on fire, drawing crowds on a consistent basis the likes which that territory has yet to see again this decade, nor will it ever most likely. Ironically, when The Fabs were created, the original plan was for them to be baby faces for a while, but then turn heel on Fargo, feud with Jerry Lawler, and be managed by, you got it, Jim Cornette.

Eventually The Fabs drifted to the AWA in mid-1984 to try and re-create their local popularity on a larger scale. The timing wasn't right, as at almost the same time, the Road Warriors came into the AWA after Vince McMahon Jr. purchased Georgia Championship Wrestling, which the Warriors were leading draws for.

Naturally the meetings between The Fabs and the Warriors were inevitable. Unfortunately, the Warriors were the crowd favorites in most cities, which resulted in the Fabs never achieving the popularity they'd hoped for. By early 1985, the Fabs were out of the AWA and back in Tennessee. While still popular, things were never quite the same, and they drifted to Mid South for a very brief attempt at being heels and feuding with the Rock & Roll Express and Guerrero brothers, before winding up in Florida.

The Florida promotion was going nowhere and the team was going nowhere. Eventually Keirn got into real estate and Lane was just a singles name on the card when the call came from Cornette.

Most feel the Midnight team, if anything, improved with Lane as a member. Condrey was the stronger technical wrestler of the two, however Lane had more speed and agility and far more charisma.

By 1988, the Lane-Eaton team became legendary for their matches with the likes of The Fantastics, Rock & Roll Express, Original Midnight Express, Road Warriors and every other major baby face team in the NWA. They created moves like the rocket launcher, double goozle, divorce court and the most recent, the vegomatic.

As the year came to a close, the Express and Cornette made the dangerous attempt at going baby face. History shows that no manager in the history of wrestling has ever meant anything for anything but a brief run as a baby face. But Jim

Cornette wasn't on the list of those who had tried and failed.

TED DIBIASE - THE MILLION DOLLAR MAN

If ever there was a Rodney Dangerfield of professional wrestling, Ted DiBiase would be it.

DiBiase's ring character of The Million Dollar Man, obviates what is beneath the exterior, probably the best worker Titan Sports has had in the new era.

But even though DiBiase is well publicized, his gimmick and name are over to the general fan, his co-workers respect him as being the top performer on the circuit, but most fans don't see past the exterior.

On the exterior is the physique. DiBiase doesn't have the worst physique in wrestling. He hardly looks like Dusty Rhodes. But he's no bodybuilder, either, and in a circuit where fans judge wrestlers by the size of their biceps, DiBiase comes up short in so-called ability in many people's eyes.

DiBiase is someone who was practically born into the wrestling business. For the past decade, he's been looked upon by many as a future World Champion, something that three times he came close to but never quite achieved.

His roots go way back in wrestling. His father, "Iron" Mike DiBiase was an NCAA champion from Nebraska, a leading candidate for the U.S. Olympic team, and a successful pro who held the NWA World junior heavyweight championship. The elder DiBiase died in a wrestling ring of a heart attack when Ted was still a teenager. His mother, Helen Hild, was also a wrestling star.

He went on to play linebacker at West Texas State University, befriended the Funk family, and trained for pro wrestling. While at West Texas State, coincidentally some of his teammates included quarterback Tully Blanchard, offensive lineman Manny Fernandez, tight end Tito Santana, linebacker Kelly Kiniski and former San Francisco 49er offensive lineman John Ayres.

As a protege of Dick Murdoch, DiBiase started out in the Mid South territory in the mid-1970s, got some national exposure in the WWF by the end of the decade as the first North American (later Intercontinental) champion, and wound up in Atlanta, groomed as the replacement for then-NWA champion Harley Race.

The promised title belt never came his way, however, as it went first to Dusty Rhodes, and then to Ric Flair.

He went back to work for the Mid South group, diving time between Mid South and Japan when Bruiser Brody's jumping from All Japan to New Japan gave Giant Baba a void which he had DiBiase fill as Stan Hansen's tag team partner and frequent visiting U.S. star.

As the UWF, which Mid South evolved into, began to expand nationally, DiBiase was being groomed once again to be a World champion, but fate entered again. This time Bill Watts sold the UWF to Jim Crockett, and booker Dusty Rhodes, in his infinite wisdom, gave the UWF title to Big Bubba Rogers

and upon the decision, DiBiase left for the WWF and his role of The Million Dollar Man--or the wrestling version of Vince McMahon.

While the role didn't take off immediately, as a McMahon personal idea, it was pushed until it got over, and DiBiase played the arrogant rich act tremendously, to the point it overshadowed his wrestling ability. While DiBiase was Titan's premier worker, he was also in a place where work rate mattered none.

But as a heel role, The Million Dollar Man was a hit, and two consecutive heel of the year awards is proof of that.

TATSUMI FUJINAMI - MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER

The long-time understudy of Japanese legend Antonio Inoki chose 1988 as the year to break into his own. While he has yet to succeed in his ultimate goal of taking the top spot away from Inoki, as part of his efforts, he was considered by the Observer readers as the best worker of the year.

Fujinami, originally from the Musashi section of Oita, Japan, was born December 23, 1953 and turned pro in the spring of 1971. His first minor recognition came a few years later when he won the "Young Lions Cup," the annual tournament among New Japan preliminary wrestlers which usually predates their ascension to stardom.

Fujinami is considered by many to be the best conditioned wrestler active today, and was rated by Lou Thesz as one of the 25 greatest wrestlers of all-time.

Fujinami's original stardom came from a plan of Hisashi Shinma to start featuring lighter wrestlers. While many credit Satoru Sayama for popularizing the junior heavyweight division in Japan, the truth is that it was Fujinami who was the actual pioneer, although Sayama took it to new heights.

Fujinami's first major fame came when he won the newly-created WWF junior heavyweight championship on January 23, 1978 from Jose Estrada in Madison Square Garden. He then returned to Japan, and toured the U.S. for not only the WWF but also the NWA as junior heavyweight champion and was awarded the NWA International junior heavyweight title as well and would often defend the championship for Eddie Graham in Florida. As junior heavyweight champion, Fujinami was a genuine World champion as he defended the title in the U.S. for the WWF, Championship Wrestling from Florida and for Mike LeBelle's Los Angeles promotion, plus had occasional appearances working for Stampede Wrestling (where Japanese fans first had a chance to witness a young Dynamite Kid) and title defenses in such exotic locations as Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Taiwan, Honolulu and even in Italy. His popularity was such in Italy that a few years ago he was voted the third most popular athlete of any kind, including soccer players, in the country.

It was decided late in 1981, that the junior heavyweight days were over, a decision sparked by the success of Sayama, who the promotion

wanted to build the division around. Fujinami moved up to the heavyweights and was given another WWF title, billed as the International title in September of 1982 and traded the title back-and-forth in 1983 during his famous feud with Riki Choshu.

In 1984, when Giant Baba and Naoki Otsuka engineered the famous raid of Riki Choshu's army from New Japan to All Japan, it was Fujinami that stood between the retention or dropping of New Japan's television show by TV-Asahi. Things were tense since it was known by those behind-the-scenes that if Fujinami would have jumped, since New Japan had already lost four key wrestlers to the UWF and a dozen more to All Japan, that New Japan would have been dropped from television which eventually would have spelled the finish of the company. However, Fujinami stayed with New Japan, with promises made that would guarantee him the top spot when Inoki finally stepped aside. But that wasn't coming as soon as Fujinami probably expected at the time.

During his career, Fujinami has slowly gained weight, starting at around 160 pounds, to approximately 235-240 pounds today on a 5-foot-9 inch frame.

Fujinami remained No. 2 on the New Japan totem poll until 1986, when Akira Maeda returned to the promotion following his stint with the original UWF. By the summer of 1987, when Riki Choshu jumped back to New Japan, Fujinami fell to No. 4 and was fading fast.

Finally, it was time to make the move. Fujinami threatened to quit the promotion if he wasn't made the top dog. Luckily for New Japan, Fujinami's threats came just a week before Antonio Inoki's injuries knocked him out of action for several months. New Japan put Fujinami on top and gave him its World heavyweight title (which Inoki had held) beating Big Van Vader (Leon White) at the Ariake Coliseum in the Tokyo Bay Area.

Fujinami remained on top through the summer, and had a sizzling 60 minute draw with Inoki which was voted Match of the Year in Japan, in which he retained his title on a prime-time television special. Inoki made his power-play after the match, in which Fujinami carried him to one of Inoki's best performances in years.

Inoki walked out on New Japan and wouldn't return unless he was given the top spot. The tables had turned on Fujinami, and after a month with Fujinami on top, New Japan made its decision. Inoki was coming back, with his demands met. Instated back as company president, Inoki made the statement that anyone who didn't follow his orders would be history.

Fujinami instead left for the United States, and surprisingly captured the Pacific Northwest title from The Grappler (Len Denton) in Portland, and later had unification matches (ending with DQ endings) against World title claimants from both the AWA (Jerry Lawler in Memphis) and World Class (Kerry Von Erich in Dallas).

Finally, Fujinami returned for the tag team tournament, but before the year was out, captured the World Class title from Von Erich in Tokyo, only to return the title to Von Erich as part of their pre-match arrangement with the excuse that the match didn't end via a pinfall. He then shockingly did a clean job for Grappler the next night in Portland, Oregon.

Fujinami plans to tour the U.S. frequently during 1989, as IWGP champion and try to establish himself as an international star. While his success in surpassing his long-time mentor was short-lived in 1988, Fujinami still hopes to gain the spot permanently in 1989, especially amidst rumors that Inoki will retire this spring after the series with the Russian Olympic athletes is completed.

THE BEST ON VIDEO: BEST MATCHES OF THE YEAR

By Jeff Bowdren

It's year-end time and for the last two years, I've been trying to get Dave to do an article running down the best matches of the year. Since he hasn't seen fit to do it, I've decided to try and pick up the slack. In some months, I'm picking three matches and in other months, only one or two. Obviously some months had more good matches than others. And some months were "down" months.

JANUARY 1988: The best match of the month was Chigusa Nagayo vs. Yukari Omori from January 15 at Korauken Hall in Tokyo. The stipulations of the match were that Omori would retire if she lost, while Chigusa was putting up the World's Women's title that she had won in October from Omori. The match went 31:52 with both women showing incredible stamina before it ended with no decision. Chigusa was, of course, great in her role as the consummate baby face. Second place in Shiro Koshinaka vs. Keiichi Yamada from January 25 in Gifu.

FEBRUARY: The match of the month was Keiichi Yamada vs. Hiroshi Hase from February 5 at Tokyo's Korauken Hall. This may have been the first Japanese meeting between possibly the two best junior heavyweight wrestlers in the world. Hase survived a superplex off the top rope and came back to win. Second place is Nobuhiko Takada vs. Shiro Koshinaka from February 4 in Osaka while third place was Dump Matsumoto's retirement match on February 25 in Kawasaki. This match had Matsumoto & Yukari Omori vs. The Crush Gals. This was the retirement match for both Dump and Omori and featured the very emotional finish was Dump and Chigusa teaming up after the match was over for an impromptu tag match against Asuka & Omori for the first and only time.

MARCH: This month had a lot of good matches including bouts from the first Clash of the Champions. My pick for the top one was Nobuhiko Takada vs. Hiroshi Hase from March

11 in Nagoya. At a recent tape-a-thon that I attended, this was chosen as the best match of 1988. The match was even more interesting because of the amateur background of Hase (a 1984 Olympian) and the "shooter" image of Takada. Second is the Ric Flair vs. Sting 45 minute draw from the first Clash of the Champions. Third was Tiger Mask vs. Jumbo Tsuruta from March 9 in Yokohama. The last five minutes of this match were the best five minutes of wrestling in 1988.

APRIL: The best match was the famous Midnight Express vs. Fantastics match on April 26 in Chattanooga. This was the match in which The Fantastics captured the U.S. tag team title. This match featured the "brutalization" of Bobby Fulton. Actually, in this match, Stan Lane was trying to be Akira Maeda and Bobby Fulton was pretending that his entire body was Riki Choshu's eye. This match came off as brutal as a U.S. match could be. Bobby looked like he was going to need CPR at any moment. Finally he tagged out and The Fantastics came back for the win. Second was a 10-men elimination tag team match in which Hiroshi Hase & Kuniaki Kobayashi & Hiro Saito & Norio Honaga and Kensuke Sasaki beat Shiro Koshinaka & Keiichi Yamada & Akira Nogami & Tatsutoshi Goto & Kantaro Hoshino on April 27 in Osaka. The match came down to Yamada and Kobayashi, and Kobayashi pinned Yamada to win the thing. Third was a match on April 7 in Mexico City as Atlantis & El Azteca & Ringo Mendoza beat Pirata Morgan & Hombre Bala & El Verdugo from Mexico City. Atlantis does some things here that will make you simply jump out of your seat.

MAY: Tops this month was a battle between two longtime rivals. Owen Hart met Hiroshi Hase for the IWGP jr. heavyweight title on May 27 in Sendai with Owen coming away with the championship. I'm of the opinion that this is the match that really elevated Owen Hart in the eyes of the fans of Japan. He went from simply being a "very good" wrestler to being one of the "great" wrestlers. Second is Owen Hart vs. Makhan Singh on May 13 in Calgary. This was Hart's final match for in Calgary before leaving for the Japan tour, which preceded his Titan stint. He was challenging for the North American title that Singh had won the previous week. It appeared Hart won the title, but since he used an object, that Singh had brought into the ring, the decision was reversed and he was disqualified. Third was Akira Maeda vs. Kazuo Yamazaki on May 12 at Tokyo's Korauken Hall. The UWF's first card was an amazing success and the first main event was great mainly due to Yamazaki, who put on a fantastic performance carrying an out-of-shape Maeda through a tremendous match.

JUNE: Owen Hart finishes on top for the second month in a row, this time in the match he lost the junior heavyweight title to Shiro Koshinaka in. It was another great one. An interesting note for trivia buffs. Hart wasn't originally going to drop the title, but since he was going to start with Titan, the finish had to be changed. This match was on June 24 in Osaka. Hart gets the runner-up spot as well, with his June 10 Hiroshima match against Keiichi Yamada. This match was in Yamada's home-town, and Hart played a new role, almost a Ric Flair-style heel champion who sells most of the match before scoring a win. Third was the match where Tatsumi Fujinami pinned Riki Choshu on June 24 in Osaka to regain the IWGP heavyweight title.

JULY: Pick on top is Yoshiaki Fujiwara vs. Don Nakaya Neilsen from July 29 in Tokyo. I voted this mixed match as my choice for match of the year. I found this match so intense that I became a total mark watching it and almost believed that it was real. I've never seen two guys come so close to portraying genuine hatred. Neilsen isn't a worker, yet he did the best job of portraying the "Ugly American" since Kevin and Kerry Von Erich were last there. Second place is The Foot Loose keeping their Asian tag team title beating Shunji Takano & Shinichi Nakano on July 19 in Tokyo. Third was the Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage cage match on July 22 at Madison Square Garden. This was another great match, which featured a lunatic climbing up on the cage to get at Virgil, just before the finish.

AUGUST: The now-annual Battle of the Crush Girls highlighted the month. The Chigusa Nagayo vs. Lioness Asuka match, which ended up with the Women's title held up, set the new world record for most streamers ever thrown in a pro wrestling match. You couldn't even see the two wrestlers in the ring at the introductions because of the streamers. Chigusa "hurt" her shoulder and had apparently lost the title, and the crowd was literally crying at the result. However Asuka refused to accept the title under those circumstances. This match took place on August 25 in Kawasaki. Second was the tag match in which Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu regained the PWF tag team titles beating Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara, who had won the title the previous night. This was 30 minutes of non-stop action. Third was also from Japan, the famous Antonio Inoki vs. Tatsumi Fujinami 60 minute draw on August 8 in Yokohama.

SEPTEMBER: Tenryu & Hara vs. Tsuruta & Yatsu make the list again. These four had the best tag team matches in the world outside of Midnight Express vs. Fantastics during 1988. They just beat the snot out of each other all year long. This meeting was on September 15 in Tokyo, on Baba's special card for the fans who presented Brody's family with gifts. Second was the match in which Shunji Takano & Shinichi Nakano beat The Foot Loose in a match where the Foot Loose not only lost their Asian tag team titles, but also their hair. Finally, third on September 29 was the New Orleans tag team match where the Road Warriors captured the NWA title from the Midnight Express. This was the match which truly got the Midnight Express over as baby faces thanks to a great, although short, match and some classic commentary from Jim Ross. Bobby Eaton must have thought he was back in the "Jet Set."

OCTOBER: The October 28 match in Yokohama between Jumbo Tsuruta and Genichiro Tenryu was the type of great match that Japanese fans love. There was a lot of interest going in, and the two wrestlers didn't let anyone down. This had a lot of stiff moves and 36 minutes of solid action before Tenryu was disqualified for a low blow.

NOVEMBER: This was the slowest month for great matches. The best one I saw was the 20 man tag team match from the Survivors Series. The match was at its best when Tully Blanchard

and Arn Anderson were wrestling the Rockers. It slowed down noticeably when the two teams were eliminated.

DECEMBER: The classic match of the tag team tournament was Baba's championship match, where Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy beat Genichiro Tenryu & Toshiaki Kawada. This established Kawada as a solid main eventer and Tenryu's new partner after

Ashura Hara was fired. Second is the Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger match from Starrcade on December 26 in Norfolk. And finally, the December 7 Chattanooga match from "Seasons Beatings" in which Ric Flair & Barry Windham beat the Midnight Express. This was one of the most eagerly anticipated matches of the year, and nobody was let down.

TOP WRESTLING STORIES OF 1989

By Chris Zavisa

Anyone can pick the top news stories of 1988, but it takes real foresight to pick the top stories of 1989 before the year even starts. So here they are:

THE BATTLE FOR THE WWF

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in November of 1989 that the World Wrestling Federation can no longer use the initials "WWF" to promote its business activities. A lower court injunction in favor of the World Wildlife Fund was upheld. A spokesman for the naturalist group expressed joy at the high courts ruling.

"Originally we didn't care about their having the same initials as us, but their heavy use of animals at their events, plus the naming of over half of their performers with animal nicknames was just causing too much confusion in the mind of the public."

Attornies for Vince McMahon and Titan Sports downplayed the court decision saying, "We were previously thinking of dropping the wrestling part of our name anyway since it has a lot of negative connotations and was not altogether appropriate given the nature of our product."

BIG BATTLE IN TOKYO

After the dismal failure of the Soviet Union Olympic wrestling team in the rings of New Japan, Antonio Inoki was forced to revert back to the "beat the big American" philosophy late in the year. In a much publicized match in late August, Inoki signed former pro basketball star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to wrestle him for the IWGP title. Kareem was signed for \$250,000.00 to wrestle one match. It was also rumored that Jabbar picked up another \$100,000 doing a TV commercial for an Oriental rug outlet.

The match itself was a disaster as Kareem sky-hooked Inoki over the ring ropes and onto the timekeepers' table, fracturing the largest bone in Inoki's body, his jaw. A riot broke out in Tokyo's Sumo Hall, prompting the arena to once again ban professional wrestling for one year. Within one week, the Japan Sumo Association also added pro basketball to its list of banned sporting events.

MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL ANGLE

Florida Championship Wrestling (now lovingly known among wrestling insiders as "Gore-ida Championship Wrestling") held a massive July 4 card in Tampa calling it, "The Red, White and Blue Spectacular." Everyone thought the name referred to the patriotic nature of the holiday, but were later shocked to discover the true meaning of the title.

New DOLWF World Champion Dusty Rhodes, covered from head to mid-stomach in crimson, choked albino-wrestler The Himalayan Snowman so severely that his face resembled an overripe blueberry. Rhodes' sometime tag team partner Dick Murdoch then stormed the ring and broke the deadly hold by crashing a water bottle on Rhodes' cranium. This set up their five-month feud, climazing on Christmas night at the "Red and Green Christmas Spectacular" in Orlando. Speculation about the true meaning of that title was rampant.

TRUTH, JUSTICE AND THE AMERICAN WAY

World Wrestling Council boss Carlitos (Carlos) Colon expressed relief in the findings of a San Juan criminal court that Frank Goodish, a.k.a. Bruiser Brody, had died of "self inflicted wounds." Colon's long-time friend and business associate Jose Gonzales had been facing a charge of "use of unneccessary force," a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of \$200, in the case where Gonzales claimed he desperately tried to keep Brody from knifing himself in three vital organs while they were along in the bathroom. The trial was postponed 16 different times over the past year-and-a-half.

The jury believed Gonzales' attornies arguments that Goodish "had a long established propensity for opening up his own body with sharp and lethal instruments."

HEY EVERYBODY! THIS IS JIM CORNETTE, MANAGER OF THE WORLD FAMOUS, NOT ORIGINAL MIDNIGHT EXPRESS! THAT'S BOBBY AND STAN, NOT BOBBY AND DENNIS, DENNIS AND RANDY, RICKEY AND ROBERT, STEVE AND STAN, OR BUSH AND QUAYLE! AND SPEAKING OF BUSH, DO YOU REALIZE I WENT ALL YEAR WITHOUT A DEMEANING FEUD WITH SOME BLOWZY BIMBO LIKE BABYDOLL? I BETTER GET MY CONTRACT REWRITTEN! WELL, WHAT A YEAR, HUH? 1988'S FINALLY OVER, AND SO IS DUSTY RHODES. HEY! HAPPY NEW YEAR! HEE HEE, NOW WE'LL SEE IF IT'S FUNKY LIKE A FLUNKY! NOW, WHO WOULD 'VE GUESSED THIS TIME LAST YEAR THAT WE'D TURN OFFICIAL BABYFACE DURING '88? CERTAINLY NOT ME! I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO WRESTLING THE FANTASTICS ANOTHER FOUR HUNDRED TIMES, OR MAYBE RENEW OUR CLASSIC FEUD WITH THE ROCK N' ROLL EXCESS WHEN THEY TRIED TO RETURN AFTER THEIR WORLD TOUR OF BOTH AWA CITIES! WHEW! TALK ABOUT CLOSE ONES! BUT WHAT ELSE COULD WE DO? I MEAN, PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS ADMIRERD OUR ABILITIES... BOBBY'S INCREDIBLE KNEE-SHATTERING LEAPS, OR STANSFIELD'S IMPECCABLE OPPORTUNISM, OR- HBT! DON'T KNOCK STAN! 'LEAST HE GOT STEVE KEIRN OUTTA THE BUSINESS! BUT MOST OF ALL IS YOURS TRULY! EVERYONE MARVELS AT MY ABILITY TO TALK NON-STOP, REMAIN ARTICULATE AND NEVER TAKE A BREATH! HECK, IT'S NOTHING, REALLY, JUST THAT I'VE SPENT YEARS LISTENING TO OL' DUSTY RHODES...



ALL 'YA' GOTTA DO IS EVERYTHING THE OPPOSITE! BUT WE'RE TOUCHED BY PEOPLE'S CONCERN FOR OUR CAREERS. THEY'RE ALWAYS ASKING ME "JIM, WHY DON'T YOU GO TO THE WWF?" WHY INDEED! WHY SHOULD I GO TO A PLACE RUN BY A CRETIN HAS A RIDICULOUS TRAVEL SCHEDULE, REEKS WITH AN OVERABUNDANCE OF STALE RETREAD MANAGERS, AND WOULD UNDOUBTABLY ABUSE, MISUSE, OR OTHERWISE VIRTUALLY IGNORE MY AWESOME TALENTS? I'VE HAD ALL THAT FOR YEARS! IT'S THOSE SAME PEOPLE WHO ASK ME "JIM, HOW COME YOU NEVER MANAGE ANYONE ELSE?" APPARENTLY THEY NEVER SAW MY EARLY SOLO EFFORT FOR THAT SHORT-LIVED GEORGIA SUB-CIRCUIT (CREATED BY THAT IDIOT OLE ANDERSON WHERE HE STUCK ME WITH JERRY NOVAK AND THE ANGEL. YOU DON'T REMEMBER? GOOD! 'CAUSE IF YOU DID REMEMBER, YOU WOULDN'T ASK! OF COURSE WE HEAR THE CHEERS... I MEAN, WITH MY DAZZLING SMILE, DIMPLED CHEEKS, BOYISH CUTE FACE, AND A HUGE BUTT, WELL-- WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE, BROTHER? AND SPEAKING OF HIM, WELL WHAT DO YA EXPECT FROM A GUY NAMED BRUCE? OH ENOUGH OF THIS! BY NOW THE REST OF YOU MUST BE WONDERING "JIM, WHY THE HELL ARE YOU DOING A MONOLOGUE FOR THAT SOPHOMORIC SLUG MR. MIKE? 'CAUSE HE CAN DRAW ME, YOU IDIOTS! BUT I'M THRILLED TO INTRO THE LATEST IN BANALITY, THE ULTIMATE IN INANITY, THE PINNACLE OF PROLIXITY, THE VERY STANDARD OF STUPIDITY! READY? 'CAUSE HERE HE GOES AGAIN, WITH ANOTHER...



YEAR IN Pictures



CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHERE THE CROWDS HAVE GONE... HATES THE GLITTER AND GLITZ OF TODAY'S WRESTLING PRODUCT. RESPONDS BY PROMOTING A WOMEN'S UNGERIE BATTLE ROYAL.



PARLAYED HIS DYNAMIC PERSONALITY INTO A VAST FAMILY FORTUNE... LUCKED OUT IN FINDING THE REAL MILLION DOLLAR MAN AFTER SUFFERING ONE TOO MANY RHODE BLOCKS.



WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO SAY? DESPITE ALL LOGIC, THIS ALL TIME POSTER BOY FOR PRO CHOICE STILL HAS A JOB!



FOOLS RUSH IN WHERE ANGLES FEAR TO TREAD... WELL, LORD HAVE MERCY! OR AT LEAST JERRY JARRETT HAVE MONEY. THANKS TO BOTH, DALLAS WRESTLING NO LONGER 'PUTTIN' ON THE FRITZ'...



IT'S NOT MY FAULT!!

THAT I DID THAT
STUPID ANGLE THAT
NOBODY UNDERSTOOD &
I CAN'T BEGIN TO EXPLAIN!

KEVIN
SULLIVAN
THOUGHT
IT UP!

WELL... THERE'S ONLY
ONE TOWER OF PIZZA...
ONLY ONE KANSAS CITY...
ONLY ONE COUNTRY NAMED GERMANY...
ONLY ONE WORLD ON THE PLANET...
ONLY ONE FOOT IN MY...



CHAMPIONSHIP LOGIC
OF THE MODERN DAY
WEARER,
KERRY VON AIRHEAD

WHEY-OH BRUTH-AH!

DO I MIND DAT THEY
DECKED ME OUT IN THIS
DEGRADING, RACIST POPCORN
PIMP GET UP...?

DO I MIND WHEN THEY
THEN STICK ME WITH THIS
INSULTING WHITE TRASH
RED-NECK BIG BOSSMAN BIGOT
ICON?? BOSSMAN, HMPHF!

DO I MIND THAT THEN I "MANAGE"
THE MOST TASTELESS RACIAL SLUR
YET, THAT JIVE-ASS HONKY
AKEEM, WHOSE GIMMICK
IS HE "ACTS BLACK"?

DO I M-... HEY-
DO I HAVE A MIND??

PRETTY IMPRESSIVE,
EH? 'COURSE THERE
ARE THOSE WHO
SAY MEBBE MY
LEGS AREN'T
DEVELOPED
ENOUGH, TUD
...

LOX
LAGGARD,
the TOTAL
PUCK-HEAD

AHH, BUT
WHA' DATHEY
KNOW??

OOOOH YEAH!

I GOT A BITCHIN' WIFE!
I GOT A WORLD TITLE!
I'M MAKIN' LOADS A DOUGH...

SO WHY DO I TALK LIKE
I'M TERMINALLY CONSTIPATED??

So, SOME YEAR, HUH? ... HUH?? WELL,
AN INTERESTING YEAR AT LEAST, WITH
PLENTY OF MONDO-RINGOS TO STULTIFY
ARE MOST DEMANDING STANDARDS...

'COURSE THE UNMITIGATED LEADER OF
INDUSTRY BAD TASTE, THE WWF, FOISTED
ITS HIGH GLOSS DROSS TO HEIGHTS UN-
SURPASSED. THEY CONTINUED TO REACH
NEW MILESTONES 'DE MAINSTREAM,
THIS YEAR BEING NETWORK PRIME TIME
AIR PLAY--- REAL PURPOSE JUST BEING
THE WRESTLEMANIA SET UP WITH THE
EPOCHAL HOGAN TITLE LOSS. STILL, WE
THINK THEY MORE THAN PROVED THEIR
POINT THAT THIS LITTLE PSYCHODRAMA
IS JUST SOPHOMORE SILLINESS, AND
THAT NO ONE WITH AN ALPHA WAVE
COULD EVER THINK ITS ANYTHING BUT
POORLY DONE VAUDEVILLE.....

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE TRULY IMPOSSIBLE
OCCURED ALBET ALL TOO, TOO BRIEFLY WHEN
EDDIE GILBERT TOOK THE BOOK AND MADE
ALABAMA WRESTLING (CWF, SOUTHEASTERN,
WHATEVER. UNDER ANY NAME IN THE PAST,
WE'VE FOUND THEIR SHOW... YAWN...
A SHOW NOT TO BE MISSED! HE EVEN,
HONEST, HAND TO GOD, MADE 'TEZ WHATELY
ALMOST ENTERTAINING! A MIRACLE WORKED!

IS IT MY ENTROPHIED ENDORPHINS, OR DOES
SUCK GET THE BIGGEST WWF MGR PUSH??

TOP STORIES THIS YEAR? STATESIDE, BRUISER
BRODY AND SALE OF THE NWA... THE UWFS
MASS HYPNOSIS IN JAPAN FOR THE RESTO THE NORD.
HARDEST PARASE TO VOCALIZE THIS YEAR? "AWA
LADIES CHAMP- MADUSA MICELLI" CHOK, COUGH...
THAT STRETCHES THE IMAGINATION IN MANY WAYS!



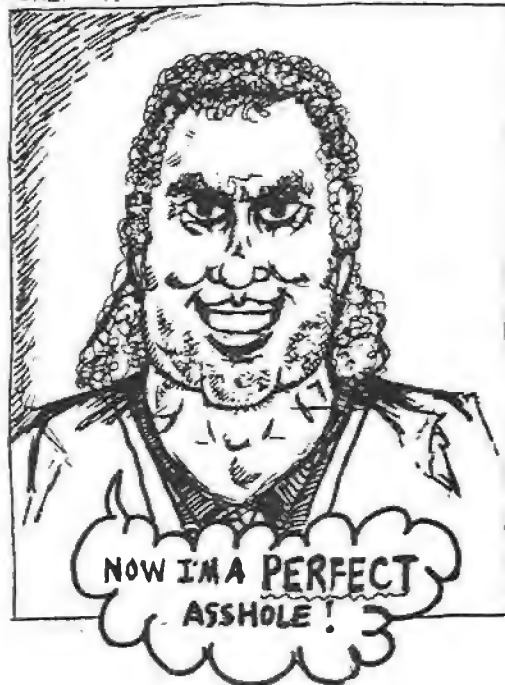
WE COULDN'T CARE LESS WHEN IT'S
ONLY THE QUESTION:
WILLIE B. HERT?
ALL WE WANT TO KNOW IS WHEN...
WILLIE B. GONE??

ARE YOU SURE THAT
FLAIR STARTED
OUT THIS WAY?



"THE MAN WHO WOULD BE RIC"

TWO OF THE BETTER SLABS OF TALENT SUCKED UP IN THE WHIFF VORTEX DURING '88 WERE CURT HENNIG AND TERRY TAYLOR. FOR HENNIG, IT WAS SUCCEEDING TO THE INEVITABLE AFTER FINDING EVEN THE AWA CHAMPIONSHIP LESS PREFERABLE THAN A REAL JOB. NOW HE BASKS IN THIS SEASON'S VERSION OF LAST YEAR'S MILLION DOLLAR MAN TOPPER AS "MR. PERFECT", COMPLETE WITH SEMI-INSPIRED INTRO TEASER SIGHT BITES. AMUSING PERHAPS, BUT INSUFFICIENT TO AUGUR GENUINE HEEL HEAT. COULD BE WORSE THOUGH, LIKE WHAT'S HAPPENED TO TERRY TAYLOR. NOW HERE'S A POOR SCHMUCK, DEDICATED TO HIS CRAFT, AND EVERYTIME HE'S APPEARED TO FIND HIS NICHE MISFORTUNE INTERCEDES. IF IT'S NOT AUTO ACCIDENT INJURIES, IT'S FINDING THE COMPANY YOU CAME TO WORK FOR TO AVOID DUSTY RHODES PURCHASED BY THE COMPANY RUN BY DUSTY RHODES. MAKES EVEN THIS OFFENSIVE, STUPID, SORTA DEGRADING LITTLE STUNT AS THE RED ROOSTER, WHERE MEDIOCRITY IS THE GIMMICK, LOOK THE CAREER BREAK IT PROBABLY IS.



BRUNO SCAMMARTINO, THE "LIVING LEGEND" (IN TITANSPORTS) WAS IN THE NEWS AND ON THE LETTERPAGES OF ESTEEMED DIRT SHEETS EVERYWHERE DURING 1988 AS ONCE AGAIN HE FELT COMPELLED TO PUBLICALLY SPEAK OUT TO THE BASIC FICTIONS UPON WHICH PRO 'RASSLIN RELIES (AND LIES, AND LIES, AND LIES). MAMA MIA! DOES WRESTLING RUN RAMPANT WITH CLOWNS, SHAMS, PHARMACEUTICAL PHYSIQUES AND PRE-DETERMINED CONCLUSIONS? WHAT WOULD THE POPE SAY?

WELL, WHATEVER HIS PONTIFFSHIP MIGHT SAY WOULD BE IN POLISH, SO WHO'D KNOW ANYWAY? BUT WHATEVER IT'D BE WOULD PROBABLY MAKE MORE SENSE THAN THE IRATE RANTS OF THE BRUNO ICON. IT'S NOT THAT WHAT MOST OF BRUNO'S DISGRUNTLED DISCOURSE ISN'T IN FACT UNDENIABLE TRUTH: WRESTLING'S SINS ARE, AFTERALL, LEGION. BUT BRUNO, WHO WE ASSUME MUST LIVE IN THE BIGGEST GLASS HOUSE IN PITTSBURGH, LOOPS A CERTAIN SENSE OF DISSOCIATION FROM THOSE VERY SHENANIGANS HE NOW DECRIES. IT IS THIS WHICH WE DO NOT BUY.

NOW KEEP IN MIND THAT HERE IN MONDOLAND WE WERE WEANED ON WRESTLING WITHOUT BENEFIT OF THE CONSECRATING CHARISMA OF THE DEMIGOD. SO OUR ROUTINE ADMIRATION AND RESPECT STOPS SHORT OF AWE AND HOLDS NO NOSTALGIA. WE NEVER DID BELIEVE, SO WHY SHOULD WE NOW?

OWW - POOR GALLANT BRUNO: SEEMS HE PUT UP WITH THOSE WELL PAID THREE PLUS YEARS OF INDIGNITY DOING HIS MINIMALIST COLOR COMMENTATOR STUNT ASIDE THE VINCE - JESSE LOUNGER ACT, JUST TO HELP NUMBER ONE SON DAVID'S CAREER. YEAH. DOES IT ONLY SEEM LIKE DAVID WAS AROUND FOR LIKE MAYBE A WEEK OR TWO? OF COURSE WE'RE STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT JUST WHAT BOOST DAVEY-BOY GOT FROM THAT SORRY LITTLE MELODRAMA BRUNO PLAYED WITH THAT SCUM? RANDY SAVAGE BACK THERE A SEASON OR TWO AGO. LORD KNOWS BUENO BRUNO HAS LOTS TO BE BITTER ABOUT, BUT WE SUSPECT A LITTLE INTROSPECTION MIGHT REVEAL THE RIGHTFUL TARGET OF THIS HOSTILITY.

THE ISSUE THEN, IS NOT VERACITY: BRUNO'S BASHING WAS OFTEN STARTLING IN ITS FRANKNESS. OUR PROBLEM, HOWEVER, IS OK' BRUNO WANTS IT BOTH WAYS: YOU SEE, HE'S LEGIT, AS IT WERE. IN HIS DAY HE NEVER SAW SUCH MAT MALFEASANCE (YA KNOW, THROWN MATCHES AND SUCH... THEY HAD PRIDE, YOU SEE), BUT HE DOES GENEROUSLY CONCEDE THE POSSIBILITY, WITH SOME TRULY APROUIT DOUBLE-TALK, OF SUCH ILL DOINGS. WHILE HE BEMOANS THAT "WRESTLING HAS BECOME AN EMBARRASSMENT", WHAT BRUNO WON'T, AND PROBABLY CAN'T UNDERSTAND, IS THAT WRESTLING'S ALWAYS BEEN AN EMBARRASSMENT. BUT B.S. (VERY APT, HIS INITIALS ARE) WON'T CROSS THAT LINE: REALLY EXPOSE THE SHAMS, AND ACCEPT THE RESULTING JUDGEMENT. SURE, THE LYING LEGEND HAS A RIGHT TO HIS OPINIONS, AND TO VOICE THEM FOR THOSE WHO CARE TO LISTEN... BUT WE DON'T. YOU SEE, BRUNO, IT'S LIKE THE OLD JOKE; WE'VE ALREADY ESTABLISHED WHAT YOU ARE: IT'S JUST A MATTER OF SETTLING THE PRICE!

"THE LYING LEGEND"





Bruiser Brody

JUNE 18, 1946 - JULY 17, 1988

"IT WILL NEVER BE QUITE THE SAME AGAIN"

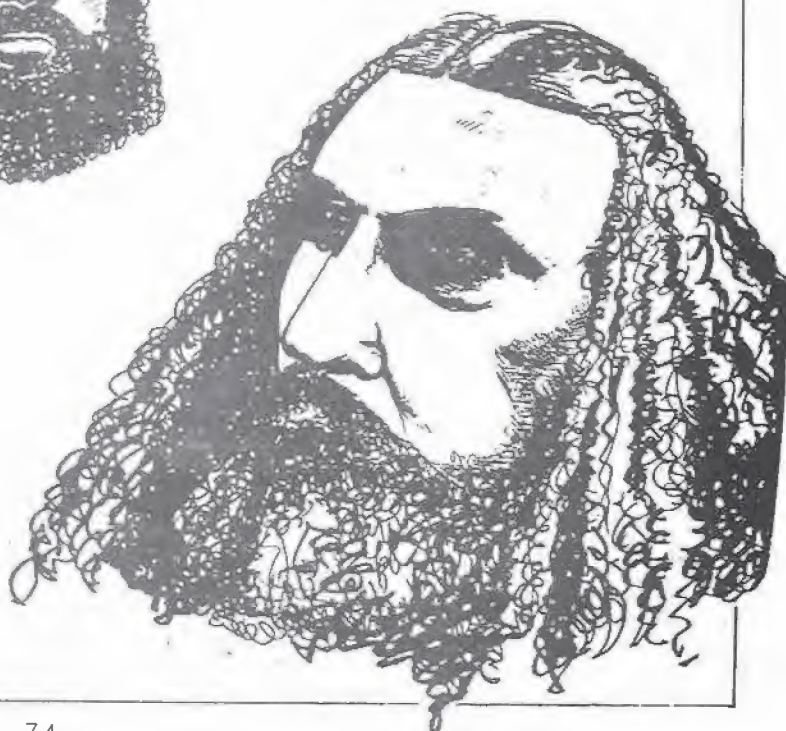
IT SEEMS IN RECENT YEARS THAT THE SHOCK OF UNEXPECTED DEATHS HAVE BECOME ALL TOO COMMON IN PRO WRESTLING. WHILE NONE ARE RECEIVED LIGHTLY, FEW MIGHT PROMPT SCANT MORE THAN FLEETING THOUGHTS OF THE DECEASED, A FAMILY'S LOSS, OR A PROMOTION'S MISFORTUNE. BUT UPON HEARING OF THE SENSELESS, INCOMPREHENSIBLE, CRIMINAL AND OUTRAGEOUS DEMISE OF **BRUISER BRODY** AN INTIMATE SENSE OF DEEP PERSONAL LOSS WAS FOR THE FIRST TIME KEENLY FELT. HOW FEW WRESTLER EVER TOUCH EVEN THE ARDENT FAN BEYOND THE MAGIC MOMENTS? WE DARE SAY NONE DID WITH THE IMPACT OR EFFECT AS THAT OF THE AMAZING **B.B.** THOSE WHO ADMIRER, AND WE ARE MANY, DID SO WITH A PERSPECTIVE GONE BEYOND THE NORMAL PASSION. AND AS IF IN REWARD, THE CLOSER ONE FOLLOWED THE FURRY BOOTS AND BARKING CHANT BOTH IN AND MORESO OUTSIDE OF THE RING, THE MORE OUR ADMIRATION WAS TURNED TO OPEN AWE. HE GAVE US REASON TO BELIEVE, AND SINGLE-HANDEDLY CAUSE FOR CONTINUING THE DISBELIEF SUSPENSION SQUARE IN THE FACE OF ALL RATIONAL REASON.

FOR OURSELVES, AS ANY MONDO CHARTER MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO REQUIRE, THE BIG-MAN WAS A KEY FACTOR FOR DEVELOPING OUR SERIOUS INTEREST, WHO COULD RESIST ANY MILIEU THAT COULD

GIVE RISE TO SUCH A SOUL? CLEARLY, ONE WORTHY OF PURSUIT. AND IN RECENT YEARS, WITH SO MUCH SEEMINGLY GONE SOUR, IT WAS BRODY'S CONTINUING PRESENCE THAT PRECLUDED ANY NOTION OR MADE ANY THOUGHT TO ESCHER CONTINUED INTEREST SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO CONSIDER. HIS ABSENCE WILL FOREVER CHANGE THOSE FUNDAMENTAL ATTITUDES THAT SHAPE OUR APPROACH AS PSYCHOTRONK FANS.

WHAT REMAINS THEN, OF THIS ULTIMATE INDIVIDUAL, WHOSE PARTICULAR INTEGRITY MADE THE SPECTACLE TRANSCENDENT? WE HAVE A HOST OF PALLID IMITATORS, BUT THEY ONLY CONFUSE HIS BARK WITH HIS BITE. BRODY'S SINGULAR *OEUVRE*, THAT AURA OF VIOLENT REALISM, MUST REMAIN HIS PERSONAL MARK. THAT WE EACH ATTACH OUR OWN MEANING TO BOTH HIS LIFE AND HIS DEATH IN COMMUNION WITH OURSELVES, SEEMS AS ONLY FURTHER PROOF AS TO THE DEPTH OF HIS VERY BEING.

AS TO THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO MUST BARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS HEINOUS OUTRAGE, THEY ARE BENEATH OUR CONTEMPT. NO REPRISAL CAN UNDO WHATS DONE. WE MAY PASS JUDGEMENT OR CHOOSE TO FORGIVE, BUT NEVER MUST WE FORGET. WITH HIS IMAGES FIXED IN TIME, WE CAN RELIVE BRODY THE WRESTLER. AND WITH OUR SUBJECTIVE MEMORIES INTACT, FOREVER WILL REMAIN IN OUR HEARTS WILL BE BRODY THE MAN. FOR THESE REASONS THANKFULLY, THE BARKING WILL NEVER BE STILLED.



THE BRUISER BRODY STORY

(Editor's Note: Before starting to work on this book, I had pretty well decided the one thing I wouldn't be doing is another story on Bruiser Brody. But while working on the book, Brody was voted overwhelmingly once again by Observer readers as Brawler of the Year and his death was voted by the editorial board as the biggest news story of the year, garnering almost every first place vote. Just this past week, in a vote by the readers of Baseball Magazine Sha in Japan, Brody was voted the Most Popular Foreign Wrestler and just a few days earlier I heard Mick Karch on the Twin Cities wrestling block refer to Brody as the single most important wrestler in the business. Over the past six months, I've received more than 100 letters asking that in future years, the award for the Best Brawler in future Observer yearbooks be renamed the Bruiser Brody award, since the man set the standard that the award would be judged by, and starting next year, that will be the case. There are comments throughout this yearbook in reference to his death, but very little in reference to his life. Over the past six years, the single best issue of

the Observer was the August 1, 1988 issue, which covered the life of Frank Goodish aka Bruiser Brody. Ironically, it is also the issue which has personally got me the most heat of anything during the life of the newsletter. While I'm not talking about the letters saying I shouldn't have devoted an issue to Brody, because similar space wasn't devoted to the death of Adrian Adonis just two weeks earlier, as there were actually only three people who wrote to complain about that, but I heard more criticism from those involved in the promotion of wrestling over that issue. That is how deep the hatred of Brody was by many wrestling promoters. While the majority of you reading this yearbook have already read it, there are several hundred who haven't. For those new readers of the Observer, I'm reprinting the story here. For those who have read it, it's something that can be read many times over without losing any impact. Also included here is a postscript to the story.

July 16, 1988.

In Japan, Shohei "Giant" Baba, promoter of All Japan Pro Wrestling, was busy making plans for his biggest card in several years. His concept was for the fans to get involved and pick a "Dream card." The matches involving his top native and foreign stars that received the most votes would be booked for August 29 at Tokyo's Budokan Hall. While Baba might not have been able to foresee exactly what matches he would wind up making, he was pretty well sure of what the main event would be. Bruiser Brody vs. Stan Hansen. It would be the first battle of the two most dominant foreign stars of this era in Japan, and it would be sure to sell out whatever building it was booked in.

On the other side of the world, in Puerto Rico, Carlitos Colon, who like Baba, is a nationally famous wrestler and promoter in his native land, was also making plans for his biggest card in recent years. The World Wrestling Council's annual "Anniversary" show was scheduled for September 10, to be held in three separate locations on the island. It would be broadcast on closed-circuit television in the Caribbean and it was also going to be broadcast live in the United States by FNN/Score, making it the first international wrestling spectacular from a foreign land ever to be shown in this country. Bruiser Brody was to work the main event. Maybe Colon was thinking of a major angle to hype the card, since business had been down a bit. Perhaps a "serious injury" would befall Brody and he would come back strong in September, looking for revenge.

In Austria, Otto Wanz, the leading wrestling promoter and recognized World heavyweight champion in Europe, probably still hadn't gotten over his rage. A week earlier, he was scheduled to defend his title against Bruiser Brody in the main event of the biggest wrestling show of the year on the continent. At the last minute, Brody decided to skip the trip because Japanese reporters would be there. A loss to Wanz, not considered a major wrestling star by the Japanese, would damage Brody's status in Japan as the toughest man to walk the face of the Earth.

In several cities in the United States, small independent promoters were working on shows, many of them in small high school gyms or dusty fairgrounds. Some were in towns so small you would need a magnifying glass to find them on the map. Because virtually all the big-name acts in the U.S. were tied up with the major promotions, the first name on virtually every one of their minds to try and bring in for the main event was Bruiser Brody.

That afternoon, Barbara Goodish of Boerne, Texas, a small town 20 miles from San Antonio, got her obligatory phone call from her husband, Frank, better known to wrestling fans as Bruiser Brody. He was on the third day of a four-day stint in Puerto Rico. There was nothing special to report. Since Brody was kind of like the James Dean of professional wrestling, a rebel both with and without a cause, she had developed almost a sixth sense about when things were going to blow up, since they often did. But in this case, all was well. The trip was going fine. He'd be home on Monday and they would have almost a month before it was time for another trip to a faraway land. But Monday never came.

Early the next morning, Bruiser Brody was pronounced dead on an operating table in San Juan. He was the victim of several stab wounds suffered at the hands of another wrestler in the dressing room the previous night before a card in Juan Lobriel Stadium in Bayamon, nine miles outside of San Juan. The last of the wrestling outlaws had been put down for the count. But this was no angle. And there would be no rematch.

Bruiser Brody was that rare "one-of-a-kind" performer. He was an enigma in the wrestling business, as much, if not more a legend in the dressing rooms around the world as he was to millions of wrestling fans on different continents. At 6-foot-5 and 280 pounds, he'd been one of the leading international superstars in the game for the past decade. He was the top foreign attraction in both Japan and Puerto Rico. He was the No. 1 star on the independent market in the United

States. He was the wildest man in the game. With his shaggy, shoulder-length brown hair, with noticeable traces of grey showing his age, and scar-laden forehead, he looked the part as well. He was probably the best brawling style performer pro wrestling ever produced. In a game where super-heavyweights often steal the spotlight, he may have been the best all-around worker of the 300-pound types in the history of a business which dates back nearly a century. His style, mannerisms and moves had been copied by dozens of wrestlers, spanning every promotion. Videotapes of his matches in Japan were studying material for prospective wrestlers. He was the "prototype" of how a "big man" is supposed to work to get over. Every new super-heavyweight that hit Japan, and many in the United States as well, whether consciously or not, copied his repertoire in at least some fashion, whether it be his crowd-chasing entrance, his moves, his barking, his chain swinging, his lacking of his hands during a bloody match, even down to his walk.

However, Brody didn't achieve the fame, at least in the United States, befitting a wrestler with his marketability, at least not in the post-1984 Wrestlemania era. "He was hard to do business with," was his rep among the major wrestling promoters. He wanted to work on his terms. He didn't want to work a taxing full-time schedule with a major office which would threaten to ruin his family life, at least if he could help it. Under virtually no circumstances would he do a job. He was often known to change finishes while in the ring. He was a ruthless businessman, who had seen both sides of the fence while catching on fire as one of the top attractions in the United States a decade ago. While the wrestling wars had given him a lucrative income, part of the price he gave in return was leaving bits of his forehead in arenas throughout the world.

Frank Goodish was born on June 18, 1946 in Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. He grew up in Warren, Michigan, a lower-class suburb of Detroit. His father was an auto worker by trade, but unemployed a lot. He grew up aggressive and he grew up bigger and faster than most everyone else. His size, toughness and natural athletic ability made him a football and basketball star in high school. He wasn't easily coached, but he was tougher than anyone else. In basketball, his size and power allowed him to dominate things underneath. While he was good enough for all-league and even an all-state mention, he knew he had no future in it.

Football was his sport. He went to Iowa State University in 1964. His contemporaries remember him as one of the best athletes on the team. But he was wild, undisciplined, and going to class wasn't in his repertoire. He wound up at West Texas State University, an outlaw school in Canyon, Texas, near Amarillo, which not-so-coincidentally produced some of the greatest pro wrestlers of this era. As a defensive end, he was strong on toughness and athletic ability, and teammates remember him being amazingly well-conditioned for such a big man, but he was weak on football fundamentals. His strengths were enough to get by in small college football.

Many of his teammates at West Texas State wound up making their mark in pro wrestling. Terry Funk, an offensive lineman, went on to win the NWA World heavyweight championship and was one of Brody's major rivals in Japan. Virgil Runnels, another offensive lineman, became "Dusty Rhodes,

the American Dream," one of wrestling's leading box office attractions of the 1970s. Bobby Duncum, a linebacker, played a year with the St. Louis Cardinals before having a lengthy tenure as a wrestling headliner. Scott Casey, a journeyman wrestler, was a defensive back. The best player on the team was running back Eugene "Mercury" Morris, who battled neck-and-neck with O.J. Simpson for the NCAA rushing title and later was an NFL superstar with the Super Bowl champion Miami Dolphins.

Ironically, there is virtually no record of Frank Goodish at West Texas State University. While his off-the-field hobby of being the champion at racing over a block of parked cars, climbing over each one individually, without being out of breath, didn't end his tenure at school, another incident did. One night, apparently drunk, Brody chopped down an important and rare tree on the school campus.

Next came a fling with pro football. He went to the Washington Redskins under Coach Vince Lombardi. He spent 1968 on the taxi squad as a 260-pound defensive lineman with a flat-top haircut before being cut prior to his second season. While he had the athletic ability to play pro football, he didn't have either the football skills or the discipline to fit into the team mold. He played a bit with the Edmonton Eskimos in Canada, then bounced around semi-pro teams in Fort Worth and San Antonio while working at odd jobs like bouncing, and later working as a sportswriter. He also got heavily into powerlifting. His coach in Fort Worth said Goodish was the class of the Texas Football League and couldn't believe someone of his athletic ability didn't make it in the NFL. As a sportswriter, he was strong on humor, but weak on spelling. He also had another problem. His fingers were so big that when he typed, he often hit two keys at once. While playing for the San Antonio Toros in 1973, at the time the best minor league football team in America, and writing for the local paper, he met pro wrestler Ivan Putski in the gym. Putski convinced him to take the plunge into pro wrestling.

He started under promoter Leroy McGuirk in what later evolved into Bill Watts' Mid South wrestling territory. Several months later he debuted in Texas for Fritz Von Erich, starting out with the "fan out of the stands" gimmick. His career took off fast. He got his first major break as a headliner in Florida, then considered the best wrestling territory in the country, in late 1975, under the ring name Frank "The Hammer" Goodish. He won the Florida State title from Rocky Johnson, and headlined for several months in a feud with Billy Robinson. The other leading heel in the territory at the time was Killer Kowalski, who convinced Vince McMahon Sr. that Goodish was prime material for World Wide Wrestling Federation main events against then-champion Bruno Sammartino. Brody left Florida for the Northeast, where McMahon gave him the new ring name, Bruiser Frank Brody. He was placed in the unenviable position of following up "Superstar" Billy Graham (probably the top heel of that time) and Stan Hansen (who gave Sammartino his famous neck injury) as top challenger for the WWWF title. However, as a live version of the caveman-turned-powerlifter, weighing around 320 pounds, he was tailor-made for the New York market.

The stay ended with problems after a backstage argument between Brody, McMahon and Gorilla Monsoon, which almost resulted in a brawl between the two behemoths. After that was over, Brody somehow found it impossible to get work in the United States. He drifted off to New Zealand, where he met his wife, who did public relations for the hotel that he was staying at, and who knew nothing about pro wrestling.

Von Erich brought Brody back to the United States in late 1977. He was the perfect opponent for Fritz, the promoter and top babyface in the Dallas area. As a willing bleeder, he sold the concept of Fritz' "Iron Claw" hold to perfection. He had already turned into one of the best working big men around, which allowed him to carry Fritz, who was then in his late-40s. Brody was Fritz' leading rival for years, and held the American title on four occasions in Texas. Fritz repaid him by getting him booked in St. Louis and Kansas City, where he became an instant sensation. Then, with his connections with Giant Baba, Fritz set Brody up for his first Japan tour in January of 1979.

Brody had already caught fire in the United States as one of the five leading box office attractions in the country in 1978. It was pretty well acknowledged that with his size, athletic ability, working ability, gimmick and charisma, he would get over big anywhere he was given even the slightest opportunity. Although Brody's look made him a natural heel, in virtually every city he appeared on any type of regular basis, he was soon getting cheered heavily by the fans. As was the case with the Road Warriors several years later, the fans basically made it impossible for him to be anything other than a "kick-ass" babyface. He drew many sellout crowds, headlined several circuits at once, and was one of the highest paid wrestlers of the time.

Before he ever stepped foot in Japan, it was established that he would be a superstar. He got a major push, and his philosophy and popularity in Japan changed the business from a Japanese-dominated game to a game dominated by a few huge Americans. He came to the ring screaming and swinging a chain with the instrumental version of Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song" playing in the background. The Japanese photographers followed him everywhere and he always had the chain with him, whether it be in restaurants, on the bus, or while shopping. He became an immediate cult favorite. His credo with the Japanese wrestlers was, "Don't give them anything and beat them up." Whatever problems that might have caused were more than made up for in increased box office receipts. In the 1970s, most top American stars would tour Japan once a year, get put over on TV for a few weeks, then, at the end of the tour, do the job for either Baba or his promotional rival, Antonio Inoki. But Brody, along with Stan Hansen, changed that. They didn't do the jobs. And they were so powerful and aggressive that they stole the spotlight from the Japanese. But they were so "over" with the fans that they were able to get away with it.

He was nicknamed, "The Intelligent Monster," in Japan. The gimmick of being not only the wildest and most uncontrollable wrestler, but combining that with the gimmick of being a great ring strategist put him on top of the fans' popularity listings. Brody was a favorite of the Japanese press. He spoke slowly, in English they could understand. He was

very quotable and knew many of the writers by name. Some of them considered Brody as much a friend as a star wrestler. His face graced countless magazine covers. There were books and photo albums written on him, comic book drawings of him plus all the regular novelties ranging from T-shirts and posters, all the way to match box cards and coffee mugs bearing his likeness.

In American promoters' eyes, the stardom in Japan was the worst thing to ever happen to Brody. He was never the easiest wrestler to deal with, but with the guaranteed big money coming from Japan, he wasn't going to be held under the thumb of promoters any longer. He was now dealing from a position of power, almost unheard of for wrestlers in that era. He meant box office. He had the ability to get over in a new market faster than anyone else in the business, with the exception of Andre the Giant, who was more of a one-time freak attraction. Before the invasion of the steroid boys, he came across, almost undisputedly, to the fans in the U.S., as the biggest, toughest, meanest and roughest man in the business. But when a heel was getting out of hand in a territory, if the promotion called in Brody, the results were wild action and increased houses. Still, at that point, he was by no means the total independent he was later in his career.

In 1983, Brody took his first major step in raising the ire of promoters all over the country. After the retirement of Sam Muchnick, the legendary promoter in St. Louis, regarded then as being the No. 1 wrestling city in North America, the promotion was being run by a conglomerate of folks, among them Verne Gagne, Harley Race, Pat O'Connor, Bob Geigel and Larry Matysik. Matysik broke away from the NWA, used Brody as his main attraction, and for a short while actually outdrew the NWA group. But with Brody as important as he was in Japan, especially with Baba in second place in his own bitter promotional war with Inoki, blacklisting him wasn't possible anymore. And after Matysik's group failed and Vince McMahon Jr. began his national expansion in opposition to the old guard of promoters, Brody's value to the NWA increased to the point that whatever grudges were held against him were temporarily forgotten in quest of big gates and holding off McMahon.

In the pre-McMahon era, Japan was the spot for big money. Baba and Inoki had been rivals dating back to the 60s, and often, the business rivalry would explode into all-out war. Even with Stan Hansen & Brody vs. The Funk brothers feud as its main attraction, Baba's All Japan Pro Wrestling promotion was trailing Inoki's New Japan group, which had caught fire like no promotion ever had during this decade. Inoki was drawing sellouts six or seven nights per week with himself, the original Tiger Mask (Satoru Sayama), Riki Choshu, Dynamite Kid, Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant and Abdullah the Butcher among his leading attractions. A scandal on Inoki's side in 1983, stemming from the retirement of Sayama, combined with Terry Funk's retirement hysteria, closed the gap somewhat. Baba took the lead late in 1984 when he signed Choshu and his entire army away from Inoki. Inoki was made even more desperate when McMahon Jr. held him up for a \$500,000 annual fee to book WWF wrestlers (who had toured Japan for Inoki for more than a

decade for a \$50,000 annual booking fee). When Inoki decided in 1985 not to renew his agreement with Titan Sports, he was giving up his two leading foreign draws, Hogan and Andre, coming on the heels of Dynamite Kid following Choshu's lead and joining up with Baba.

Inoki was desperate for talent and looking for revenge on Baba as well. A contact was made with Brody. On March 9, 1985, Baba promoted a huge show headlined by the Road Warriors' Tokyo debut. Because the Warriors were new and had a unique gimmick, they immediately surpassed Brody and Hansen as the top foreign drawing cards, and their \$10,000 weekly pay on their first tour equalled Brody's status after more than six years of being a top draw. On the live television card, Brody would have his first TV meeting against Choshu, then the most popular of all the Japanese wrestlers, in a tag team match. The match got totally out of control, with Choshu nearly getting knocked out at one point from a very stiff kick, and Brody was completely uncooperative in allowing Choshu any advantage during the match. Three nights later, in the middle of a six-man tag team match, also televised, Brody suddenly took his chain and walked out of the building. He had just signed a contract with Inoki. It was the most lucrative deal ever signed by a pro wrestler up to that point. For 16 weeks per year in Japan, Brody would earn \$14,000 a week in 1985, \$16,000 in 1986 and \$18,000 in 1987. He also received a six-figure signing bonus.

At the same time, the biggest thing to his U.S. wrestling was in its planning stages--Vince McMahon's first Wrestlemania at Madison Square Garden, featuring actor Mr. T in the main event. McMahon's enemies were lived at his nationwide expansion into "their" territories. It was widely assumed McMahon was on the edge financially and this show was his do-or-die. One promoter actually discussed with Brody, the wildest, toughest and craziest bird in the next, the idea of going to Madison Square Garden and jumping Mr. T as he came down the aisle, insuring that McMahon's show would be a flop. Figuring the resulting lawsuits that would follow, Brody didn't seriously consider the request.

Almost from the start with Inoki, Brody questioned whether the money was worth the aggravation, and in the long run decided that leaving Baba was the biggest mistake of his wrestling career. Baba's tours were far more organized and easier on him mentally. Inoki's tours were stressful, with constant pressure on him to do the job for Inoki. While Brody's matches with Inoki drew sellout gates in the big buildings early, including one house of \$465,000 (in the pre-dollar devaluation days) in Nagoya, the promotion matched them up so frequently that by the end of the year, the feud had cooled off because neither would do the job. The pressure was increasing on Brody, who hadn't done a job since early 1981. At the same time, with Inoki in need of new foreign talent, Brody acted as the intermediary in wooing Von Erich from his long-time association with Baba, across to Inoki, for which he was promised a sizable finders fee by Inoki.

Brody hadn't gotten his finders fee when he and Jimmy Snuka left for Japan in November for the annual tag team tournament. Brody was unhappy before he ever went to Japan, and it exploded the day before the tournament was to end. Brody had a singles match against Seiji Sakaguchi, the New Japan

booker and a former Japanese national champion in judo, who at 6-foot-5 and 280 pounds, matched up to him in size and both were about the same age. The match got out of hand, although reports differ on who started it. In any event, Brody finished it, by using his chain on Sakaguchi's knee. On the train from Tokyo the next day, heading for the tournament finals in Osaka, with Brody and Snuka scheduled for the championship match against Inoki and Sakaguchi, a message was passed to Brody from Sakaguchi. Whatever the message said, it was enough to infuriate Brody. He and Snuka got off the train at the next stop, and headed back to their hotel in Tokyo. It should be noted that in Japan, the wrestlers aren't paid until the completion of the tour, so Brody walked out on more than \$40,000. Snuka walked out on a big payday as well to show his loyalty to Brody. While the Japanese forgave Snuka, believing Brody to be the catalyst, presumably this was the end of Brody's Japanese wrestling career.

Things were changing in the United States as well. McMahon had set the U.S. scene on fire, and Jim Crockett was trying to follow in his wake. Their expansions were destroying the smaller groups, who also seemed self-destructive at times by their own actions. Brody was called upon by several of the smaller groups as a quick-fix. Even though the younger muscle men had taken away his "toughest man in the game" image with some fans, he still remained with a strong cult following.

There were at least a few occasions when McMahon and Brody negotiated, but the negotiations never got too serious. McMahon certainly knew the money Brody would draw against Hulk Hogan, but perhaps was wary of having Brody, whose reputation was of being something less than a good soldier, in his dressing rooms. Brody was certainly aware of the potential income and exposure from being a major star with Titan, but wasn't willing to sacrifice his independence nor give up time with his wife and son Geoffrey, that Titan's horrendous travel schedule would have required.

If all things had gone as expected, Brody someday probably would have worked for McMahon. With the independent promotions drying up in the U.S., and with the wrestling style in Japan so physically taxing, there eventually would have come a day when Brody's body would have given out. Even though he was addicted to training, the constant pounding of wrestling, combined with his age, somewhere down the line would have taken its toll. Probably a few years down the line, when he recognized that the end of his career was a year or two away, he'd join McMahon for one last big run, and probably in some general fans' eyes would have become the early 1990s imitation of "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan.

Ironically, Inoki and Brody got back together during the summer of 1986, when both were booked on a big card at Honolulu's Aloha Stadium. Brody returned for two matches in Japan in September, drawing two sellouts, and agreed to return for the tag team tournament for a major increase in weekly pay. Reportedly, this new record deal was for the unheard of figure of \$27,000 per week. But Inoki's business was in

so much turmoil, that his new record deal never got off the ground. Inoki himself felt Brody was worth the money, at least to himself personally, if not the promotion. Brody brought out the best in Inoki, and Inoki was able to regain a great deal of popularity because his matches with Brody were so exciting. Sakaguchi didn't think much of the deal, however, since he and Brody never had made amends from their earlier troubles. Akira Maeda was gaining his own "tough-guy" image and a match scheduled during the early part of the tour with Brody was heavily anticipated by everyone. The problem of those two getting out of control, probably as much out of dual paranoia as anything else, was considered a distinct possibility, so much so that Brody had trained himself to be in the best fighting shape of his career. But a money squabble ensued before the tour over Brody wanting his money guaranteed in case of an injury during the tour, New Japan agreeing, then reneging on that agreement at the last minute. It appeared Brody's Japanese wrestling career had ended.

Brody landed on his feet, winding up as booker in World Class for a few months. He was in hot demand as an independent when suddenly that market re-opened after the success of Wrestlemania III spawned an increased interest among armchair and would-be promoters. He wrestled for a while under a mask as Red River Jack. He even did his first pinfall job in more than six years for Abdullah the Butcher, right out of the blue, one night in Fort Worth. By October, however, he was back in Japan.

Baba wanted him back on almost a moment's notice when Ric Flair canceled a tour at the last minute, and Brody was forced to cancel a series of TV commercials and a lucrative tour of Israel to fill the spot. By the end of the December tag team tournament, in which he and Jimmy Snuka lost in the finals to Jumbo Tsuruta and Yoshiaki Yatsu, he was voted the most popular foreign wrestler in Japan once again, by a wide margin, surpassing all the Road Warriors, Bam Bam Bigelows and Hulk Hogans who had followed in his footsteps.

Deaths in wrestling, unfortunately, have become almost commonplace the past few years. Tragedy had haunted the wrestling business. Some of this is partially caused by the demands of the business itself. Others have been simply cruel twists of fate. Several sports have had drug deaths, although wrestling has had more than its share. The travel schedule and constant driving, particularly late at night driving, increases the risk of auto accidents. But even so, the number of serious auto accidents involving wrestlers in recent years has been more than slightly alarming. Some things are just bad luck. Mad Dog Vachon was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The business had nothing to do with it. A moose jumped in front of the car which went into a small lake, which resulted in the death of Adrian Adonis, The Canadian Wildman and Pat Kelly, and it seems ridiculous to blame the business for that.

Ironically, Brody was there for more than a few of these tragedies. He was in Japan in 1984 when David Von Erich died. In fact, he helped "clean up the mess" before the police arrived. One of the most memorable news clippings in the history of wrestling was on Japanese television, as Von Erich's Japanese funeral. Brody, with tears streaming down his scarred-up face, looked down and kissed Von Erich as he laid in the casket. He was the booker

for World Class when Mike Von Erich committed suicide, and in truth, had a premonition just a week or two beforehand that this would happen. He was also in Texas when Gino Hernandez passed away, and was on tour of Japan when Haru Sonoda went down in a plane crash to go on his honeymoon.

Bruiser Brody debuted in Puerto Rico as a heel in 1983, under the management of Larry Sharpe. Those who were there at the time recall that he was over like a million bucks by the end of his first weekend. Tom Renesto was the booker and there were plenty of problems over finishes. Brody did what he wanted, not what he was told, but he was able to get away with it because what he wanted always seemed to work out just fine. After a while, Renesto didn't even bother to give him finishes and just told him to do whatever he wanted. At one point, several years back, Brody was somewhat concerned while on tour when they put Joe Frazier in the ring as referee for one of his matches with Colon. Brody had caused a lot of promoters a lot of problems and was concerned that perhaps, this would be the revenge. But it wasn't, of course. Although Brody was never a perfect angel in Puerto Rico, and on occasion did question finishes, it never appeared he had any major problems in Puerto Rico, at least not on the level of those he had in the United States and Japan.

Brody had been a leading heel in Puerto Rico since his debut, but in the summer of 1987, he turned babyface by saving Invader #1, whose real name was Jose Huertas Gonzales, from a double-team attack by Jason the Terrible and Abdullah the Butcher. The two had been occasional tag team partners over the past year. While it is true that early in 1988, Brody and Colon had a pretty heated shouting match in the dressing room because Brody treated Colon's World tag team champions, Kendo Nagasaki and Mr. Pogo, like jobbers, giving them nothing, since Japanese photographers were at ringside, he had gone back to Puerto Rico a few times afterward with no problems. He often offered to lose via count out to Dory Funk Jr. in the Gillette Cup during the spring.

Brody arrived in San Juan on July 14 for the final wrestling tour of his life. The first night on the tour, he even rode to the town with two of Colon's partners in Capital Sports, Gonzales, the booker, and Victor Quinones, who worked the box office. Quinones was Brody's beat friend in Puerto Rico and all three were amicable and joked about many things and talked about how Vince McMahon had changed wrestling in the United States and whatever else came up.

A tremendous amount of rumors and varying stories have been told about the final day or two of Brody's life. Brody was one of the most streetwise wrestlers around, and generally knew when trouble was coming before it ever got there. If anything, he sometimes sniffed trouble when there wasn't any. Brody was in a lot of fights during his wrestling career, and nobody can ever recall him getting whipped, mainly because he was never caught unaware, and more often than not, threw the first punch.

I've heard what seems like 100 different versions of what happened on July 16. We've gotten police reports, reports from those in Puerto Rico, dressing room witnesses and compared notes with others investigating the death, besides hearing second-hand information from just about everyone who talked with anyone that was in Puerto Rico that night. This is what I believe to be as close to an accurate account of what happened as we are going to get.

If there was any trouble brewing that day, Brody didn't have a scent of it. He was in a good mood during the afternoon from all accounts. He had an early dinner with two of the American wrestlers that were on the tour in the hotel, when a phone call came. It was from Gonzales. He said there were some problems with taxes and he had to discuss it with him before the show. Brody said he wouldn't talk about it with either Gonzales or Colon, and that there was only one person in Puerto Rico he would talk money with, presumably Quinones. Those close to Brody insist there couldn't have been any problem with taxes because Brody kept immaculate records for the IRS, since he'd been stung a few years earlier for a six-figure sum by the IRS over unreported Japanese income, which caused him to sell lots of property, and he never wanted to go through that again. He rode to the stadium with two other American wrestlers, Dutch Mantell and Tony Atlas, for the biggest card of the weekend. Brody was scheduled third from the top, against Danny Spivey, just underneath a tag team Coal Miners Glove match pitting The Invaders (Gonzales and Roberto Soto) against Ron and Chicky Starr, and Colon defending the Universal title against Abdullah the Butcher. Business was a little slow, with maybe 8,000 fans in attendance, so there probably was some disappointment among those in the promotion.

Brody, Atlas and Mantell arrived in the babyface locker room at about 7:15 p.m. for a show which was scheduled for an 8:30 p.m. start. Most of the babyfaces had already arrived, along with three of the four owners of the business, Colon, Gonzales and Victor Jovica. Quinones was handling the box office. Also there were TNT, Miguelito Perez, Hurricane Castillo Jr., Soto, and Mark and Chris Youngblood. Gonzales was apparently sitting on a bench with a large towel around his right hand. About five minutes later he asked Brody to come into the bathroom for a private meeting, saying, "Brody, mi amigo, come here por favor," which translated means, "Brody, my friend, come here as soon as possible." This isn't the slightest bit unusual procedure in wrestling circles, as that's where most private meetings take place. Brody went in, as one witness said, "like a lamb being led to slaughter." About five seconds later, after the door closed, the babyfaces all heard a loud scream and rushed to the bathroom. The bathroom wall was made of plexiglass and was transparent. Atlas, for some reason, was looking in the direction and claimed to have seen the actual stabbing. When the wrestlers opened the door, Brody was holding his guts and blood was spurting everywhere. He was dragged out of the bathroom and panic ensued. Gonzales, whose shirt was covered with blood, left the building. The ring doctor was called to the dressing room. Brody was fully conscious at this point. His blood pressure was normal, however there were air bubbles in his blood, as one of the stab wounds severed the arteries that bring blood to the heart. Another wound, which may have been the fatal one, punctured his liver. His lung was also pierced, possibly from a third

wound, possibly by one of the other two. Brody was talking very softly with Colon as he laid on the ground of the dressing room telling Carlos, "No matter what happens, please, take care of my boy." An ambulance was called for during the commotion and arrived at approximately 7:45 p.m. Atlas left with Brody to a hospital in San Juan. When the doctors wouldn't allow Atlas to stay in Brody's hospital room, he returned to the stadium and wrestled his match.

The card went on as scheduled. The fans, of course, weren't informed as to what happened. The heels weren't either. Sometime before the card started a message was passed to the heel dressing room which said something to the effect of, Brody's been nicked and he won't be wrestling, but he's okay. One of the heels, well-known for exaggerated tales but also considered keenly aware of office maneuvers, said something to the effect of, "Oh my god, Jose killed him." He seemed very distraught, but nobody else in the dressing room took him seriously and nothing more was spoken. Most of the heels didn't find out anything until they returned to the hotel that night, and some didn't find out anything until later the next day.

Gonzales returned to the building, wearing a new shirt, and wrestled his scheduled match that night. Although the promotion knew Brody was in serious condition, they believed he had stabilized. Most seem satisfied the promotion didn't realize just how serious Brody's condition was.

Barbara Goodish was woken late Saturday night by a phone call. Her first instinct was not to answer, since that was her rule on post-midnight phone calls when Frank was on the road. However, she broke the rule and was told a terrible accident had taken place and she should head to Puerto Rico immediately. The call was from Colon's wife. She thought it was a prank, or maybe hoped it was a prank, and called the hotel, and asked for Brody. The clerk at the hotel already knew the story, and instead patched her into Dutch Mantell's room. Mantell told her things were pretty rough and that Frank might be in the hospital for a while, but he also apparently didn't know, nor did Barbara have any idea, that this was a life-or-death situation.

She packed up some things, woke up Geoffrey, and they headed to Puerto Rico. They were met in the airport by Abdullah the Butcher, who gave her the bad news. Her husband had died on the operating table in the hospital at approximately 4:30 a.m. The doctors couldn't get Brody's blood to clot and stop the bleeding, apparently because Brody had taken several aspirin, which thins the blood.

Sunday night, Capital Sports had a card scheduled for Mayaguez. Word hadn't leaked yet to the public about what happened the previous night, and a sellout crowd was there. Several of the American wrestlers had heard the news and didn't show up for the card. A few left the island almost immediately. Several of the babyfaces went to the police station to give their statements. Some of the American wrestlers hadn't heard the news and went to Mayaguez. Colon was there. So was Gonzales, ready to work again. Colon asked the wrestlers to work the show after telling

them about the tragedy, saying that Frank would have wanted it that way. Enough of the wrestlers walked out and the card had to be canceled.

Gonzales was arrested the next day on charges of First Degree Murder and a Weapons Violation. The alleged murder weapon, a knife, was never recovered by police as it had disappeared from the scene of the crime. Gonzales was held on \$120,000 bond, and was later released after posting \$12,000. His arraignment was originally scheduled for August 8, but was postponed several times when witnesses kept failing to appear. Finally, because of the testimony of two of the doctors who had talked with Brody in the hospital, Gonzales was indicted in November on charges of Voluntary Homicide, with his trial scheduled for January.

Besides being the booker and part-owner of the company, Gonzales, 42, had been a wrestler for about 19 years. He wrestled under the name Sabu Singh on the West Coast, and later under the name Manuel Cruz. He was a preliminary wrestler in the early 1970s for the WWWF under his real name. In 1976, he went to Puerto Rico under the hood as The Masked Invader, and was a main eventer shortly thereafter. He also worked in the WWF under the mask, with Johnny Rivera, as the Invaders, a preliminary tag team around 1983-84 before returning to his native land. Some recall him being a hothead and other wrestlers claim he wasn't well-liked, although the position of booker generally leads to resentment among the wrestlers.

There are several rumors and theories trying to answer the question as to why it happened. The story that got a lot of play early was that Brody was killed because he either refused to do a job for Spivey that night, or was supposed to do a job for Spivey in a tag team match the previous night and didn't do it. The police themselves did say that Invader asked Brody to lose a match and Brody said No. But that hardly qualifies as a motive. The wrestlers on the babyface side of the dressing room discount that story. There simply wasn't enough time between when Brody got into the bathroom and they heard the scream, just a few seconds, for there to be any discussion of a finish or an argument about a finish. Besides, the promotion knew full well of Brody's reputation and those in the promotion claim there was never even any talk of asking him. If that had been discussed earlier in the day, Brody would not have been in a good mood, particularly when talking to his wife on the phone and with Mantell and Atlas, nor would he have been caught unaware, if that was the situation, in the bathroom.

The story that was reported in several newspapers that they were arguing over money holds no weight either. Brody's deal in Puerto Rico was that he received a check in the mail three weeks after his appearances so he wouldn't have to carry large amounts of cash across the border. His deal was for a flat sum, not a percentage, and had been worked out well in advance by himself and Quinones. Another theory is that Brody owned a percentage of the company, and they wanted it back, but that was simply untrue. While some of the heels claim there had been problems between Brody and Gonzales over finishes over the past year, nobody could recall any problems during this tour. If there had been serious problems, Brody wouldn't have been caught so unaware. Some claim Gonzales was always paranoid about his position as babyface, and Brody was com-

petition for the spot. It is true that the promotion didn't handle the aftermath properly, particularly in allowing Gonzales to wrestle that night and presumably would have allowed him to wrestle the next night had the other wrestlers not walked out. There was also talk that Gonzales was off balance because his daughter had drowned earlier that week, but upon later investigation, it came out that incident happened more than six months earlier.

Brody's funeral was held on Wednesday in Puerto Rico. Several hundred fans in Puerto Rico attended along with both babyface and heel wrestlers (the heels were told to stay away because of kayfabe violations, but few listened to the order) and a truckload of photographers and reporters who immediately flew in from Japan. Barbara and Geoffrey Goodish watched the proceedings, trying as best to maintain their composure. During the service, Geoffrey told his mother, "I'm not going to embarrass Daddy by crying at his funeral. But when we get back to the hotel room, I think I'm going to have to cry."

Colon's promotion taped its television show the next night. There was a huge banner on the building wall in Spanish. The English translation of what was on the banner was: "We the wrestling fans on Puerto Rico wish to extend our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Bruiser Brody. Please don't judge the people of Puerto Rico by the actions of one mad man." The banner was filled with signatures of wrestling fans.

The death of Bruiser Brody made major news headlines in both Japan and Puerto Rico, and also received a lot of coverage in Texas, particularly in Fort Worth where the newspaper had articles daily for a week, some on the front page of the newspaper. Scott Ostler of the Los Angeles Times wrote a stinging column. There was even a story in The Sporting News, the only national magazine which gave the incident any coverage aside from the wrestling magazines, mainly because Sporting News is based in St. Louis, one of Brody's stomping grounds, rather than New York as most major national sports magazines. In some other newspapers, it received a line or two, maybe even a few paragraphs, from the early wire service reports. It was widely reported in several Spanish language newspapers in the United States, some with banner headlines on the front page of the newspaper. It even made the news in such exotic locations as Australia, New Zealand and even Thailand. But in most of the United States, it largely went unreported. After all, this is still professional wrestling.

And being that it is professional wrestling, the public reaction from the wrestling community was predictable. Neither the NWA nor the WWF acknowledged anything. It wasn't surprising, since the WWF never even acknowledged the passing of Adrian Adonis either, who was a major star for them as recently as one year before his death, while Brody had never even worked for the group in the "new era." Both the major groups have a policy of being oblivious to anything that happens outside their promotion. In the case of the NWA, they should have broken that rule since the TBS Saturday show is the most up-to-date national show on television. The World Class

promotion mentioned the death, and gave away Brody memorabilia at a card two weeks later, which ironically, had been booked as Brody's return to the promotion after a long absence. Joe Pedicino's Pro Wrestling this Week program did a 30 minute special on its July 30 edition. Entertainment Tonight did pieces on both Brody and Adonis. Jerry Blackwell's Southern Championship Wrestling promotion ran weekly matches of Brody on its show for the month after his death.

With or without Brody, the independent business in this country is hanging on by a thread, threatened with extinction due to McMahon's expansions. But the independents' greatest weapon for survival is no longer.

Giant Baba is now faced with his greatest challenge yet, trying to combat the threat of the Universal Wrestling Federation, without his biggest drawing card.

And Puerto Rico has to rebuild a business that has been devastated by a tragedy the likes of which this business has never seen before. Officially, the promotion told the wrestlers the week after the death that Gonzales was no longer a part of the company, but that position changed almost as soon as the initial furor was over. Most of the American wrestlers that were on that tour are no longer working for Capital Sports, and some, like the Youngbloods and Atlas, no longer work in the wrestling mainstream.

December 13, 1981. It was time for the finals of Giant Baba's annual tag team tournament. Bruiser Brody and Jimmy Snuka were facing off against The Funk Brothers. The match started out slow, but built up to the point that it is generally regarded as one of the greatest matches in the history of the Orient. Certainly it was among the most memorable. All four men were at their best here and when the dust settled, Stan Hansen had shocked the crowd by showing up at ringside (he had just a few days earlier finished a tour with Inoki, and this arrival signalled his jump to Baba). Brody pinned Dory after a kneedrop to win the tournament. For the next three years, Brody and Hansen repeated the same scene, not always winning, but always getting to the finals of the tournament, the biggest event of the year in Japan. On the final night each year, they had classic matches that fans would never forget. That was the bottom line. Whether you saw Bruiser Brody before 200 fans at an independent wrestling show, where he made the building look like the remnants of what happened after a tornado hit, or at a major arena before a sellout crowd, Brody was one of those rare wrestling personalities that fans will never forget.

POSTSCRIPT: Gonzales, who is claiming self defense, returned to work for Capital Sports shortly after Brody's death and is the booker once again. While he has not returned to active wrestling, it is generally believed that once the trial is completed, and if there is no conviction, which it is also generally believed will be the case, that he will make his "triumphant" return to the ring, with his name "cleared," sometime this coming year. Gonzales has been on the WWC television show, portrayed both as a babyface and family fan, in order to sway public sentiment in his favor before the trial. It is certainly true that Brody did have a hot temper himself, and was no stranger to incidents in the dressing room, and judging by that alone, self defense can't be ruled

out. But that still doesn't answer the question as to why so many strange things have happened when it comes to witnesses not testifying, particularly when there were more than a dozen wrestlers in the dressing room at the time of the incident. It doesn't explain alleged death threats which supposedly have kept the key witnesses afraid to return to Puerto Rico. It doesn't explain what certainly on the surface looks to be a less than aggressive attempt by the Puerto Rican police to put together the pieces and get at the truth. In fact, no logical explanation for what happened has ever come forth, which is why theories, rumors and speculation has run so rampant. Atlas, who originally spoke to reporters and the police about the incident, now has refused to testify against Gonzales, claiming he's received death threats. He also moved from Dallas to Lewiston, Maine since the incident, and has virtually disappeared from the pro wrestling scene. While we were informed that a "body attachment" order was going to be sent to Atlas, which would force him to testify, somehow the order was stymied before it ever reached Atlas. The Youngblood brothers left Puerto Rico shortly after the incident, despite having nowhere else to work in the business, and are working as bricklayers in Amarillo. The only other American in the babyface dressing room, Mantell, ironically had just stepped out of the dressing room to check the house when the stabbing took place, although he was back in just moments after the screams. Letters we have seen by someone close to another witness indicates tremendous fear among the Puerto Rican wrestlers, none of whom testified to anything at the hearing to determine if there was enough evidence for an indictment. Two U.S. pro wrestlers that were friends of Brody's, both with heavy political connections, have been unable to get any information out of Puerto Rico on the proceedings, nor could a police officer friend of Brody's from Texas, who has FBI connections. The actual police report filed on the incident was so vague that almost nothing was said.

After returning home from Puerto Rico, Barbara Goodish received an offer from Baba to come to Japan with Geoffrey and participate in a Brody Memorial card which took place August 29 in Tokyo. The news coverage and interest on Brody in Japan, where he achieved his greatest fame as something off a cult figure celebrity, was Elvis-like. The newspapers were running features fairly regularly for more than two months after his death. A significant percentage of magazine space in the weeklies in every edition through late September was devoted to career highlights and both personal and professional photos of Brody. Even to this day, six months after his death, there probably isn't one issue of Weekly Gong, or its rival Weekly Pro Wrestling, that hasn't had at least some mention or a photo of Brody. In fact, just recently Gong started running a weekly series of personal photos, interviews with Barbara Goodish, and photos of Brody's wife and son at home once again. One wrestler who toured for Inoki during late August, when the Brody furor was at its peak and Barbara and Geoffrey Goodish had become celebrities in Japan for a month, said the furor was comparable to the response in the U.S. that he remembered after the death of John Lennon.

A lot has happened in wrestling in the last six months. Ted Turner bought the NWA, and

while the balance of power in U.S. pro wrestling really hasn't changed at all, there are signs that things may change. Giant Baba's All Japan promotion went from No. 1 in Japan at the time of Brody's death to where it may be No. 3 right now, and certainly will be after the Russian invasion. The independent scene in the U.S. has dried up, and Brody's death

was a significant factor in this. It's interesting to speculate what may have happened in 1989. Perhaps the folks at TBS, in need of a fresh new face that could help them fast on a pay-per-view, would have contacted Brody. When the wrestling war between Turner and McMahon heats up, as it appears it will, perhaps Brody would have been one of the wrestlers to cash in by making the jump at a key time. It certainly would fit his m.o.

CHRIS ZAVISA'S TOP NEWS STORIES OF 1989 (continued from page 70)

Colon issued a two-page written statement reaffirming his faith in both his friend and in the criminal justice system. Gonzales, who was defending his WWC heavyweight title the same night as his acquittal, was unavailable for comment.

STILL GOING STRONG

Verne Gagne's American Wrestling Association continued to survive despite promoting only three live shows during the year. It was rumored that the only thing keeping the AWA in business was the \$235 a week in television revenue from ESPN. This money was more than enough for Gagne to pay his stable of wrestlers. Most of the AWA wrestlers do not have to depend on weekly wrestling checks since they have Social Security to supplement their wrestling income.

Gagne also surprised the wrestling world by announcing that the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) had put up \$50,000 to stage a show at their November convention in Sarasota, Fla. The main event (subject to change) was announced as Moose Cholak vs. Dick the Bruiser. Insiders speculated that an event of this magnitude may be offered on pay-per-view.

SPECIAL AWARDS

By John Hitchcock

BEST JOBBER: 1. Barry Horowitz; 2. Steve Lombardi; 3. George South

WORST JOBBER: 1. Italian Stallion; 2. Don Valentine; 3. Randy Hogan

WORST "PANIC" INTERVIEWER: Larry Nelson

WORST ANNOUNCING TAG TEAM: Rod Truongard and Superstar Billy Graham

WHO NEEDS OXYGEN FIRST AWARD: 1. Ultimate Warrior; 2. Lex Luger; 3. Andre the Giant

CLEANEST MANAGER: Downtown Bruno

FOOT IN MOUTH AWARD: Mark Lowrance for saying, "The head-butt is a genetic trait of black wrestlers."

BEST WRESTLING SIGNS FROM GREENSBORO:

1. "Hey Dusty! Ted Sez Goodbye!"
2. "Hey Dusty! How many hot dogs do you want!"
3. "Stink"
4. "Hey Lex! Put your shirt back on!"
5. "You can always tell the wrestler by lookin' at his blubber."
6. "Jim Cornette Memorial Cup"
7. "Dusty Rhodes, at 270 kilos."

SOMETHING GOT LOST IN THE TRANSLATION AWARD: Riki Choshu, at his match in Las Vegas with Jerry Lawler when Choshu didn't know the meaning of Lawler's pulling down his strap, and continued to pound away at him

1988 WRESTLING OBSERVER RATINGS

These ratings are based on the results of our annual survey of 34 members of our impromptu editorial board. The wrestlers' spot in this year's poll is listed on the left. On the right is where the wrestler finished in previous years' polls. These ratings were to be based strictly on in-ring ability displayed and workrate.

	87	86	85	84
1. Tatsumi Fujinami.....	8	3	7	8
2. Ric Flair.....	1	1	1	1
3. Barry Windham.....	4	11	67	25
4. Ted DiBiase.....	7	2	3	20
5. Keiichi Yamada.....	28	65	--	--
6. Owen Hart.....	3	27	--	--
7. Nobuhiko Takada.....	2	7	27	21
Bobby Eaton.....	6	5	9	56
9. Tiger Mask.....	11	12	14	29
10. Shiro Koshinaka.....	25	50	--	--
11. Genichiro Tenryu...	27	22	22	67
12. Arn Anderson.....	35	46	70	--
13. Akira Maeda.....	5	10	13	24
14. Eddie Gilbert.....	21	62	73	--
15. Rick Steiner.....	52	69	--	--
16. Randy Savage.....	19	19	10	18
17. Tully Blanchard....	13	13	25	61
18. Toshiaki Kawada.....	--	--	--	--
19. Kazuo Yamazaki.....	16	--	--	70
20. Masa Saito.....	9	--	--	15
21. Bret Hart.....	17	15	37	48
22. Brad Armstrong.....	20	25	39	63
23. Terry Gordy.....	30	6	8	11
24. Curt Hennig.....	12	59	--	--
25. Super Black Ninja..	29	39	58	--
26. Sting.....	45	--	--	--
27. Pat Tanaka.....	22	--	--	--
28. Dick Murdoch.....	31	36	30	51
29. Tommy Rogers.....	73	47	--	--
30. Chris Benoit.....	--	--	--	--
31. Bobby Fulton.....	--	--	--	--
32. Jumbo Tsuruta.....	43	32	33	38
33. Stan Lane.....	42	--	--	--
34. Yoshiaki Fujiwara..	24	45	45	68
35. Riki Choshu.....	13	9	6	6
36. Mike Rotunda.....	--	--	--	--
37. Biff Wellington....	--	--	--	--
38. Kengo Kimura.....	38	44	49	39
39. Pirata Morgan.....	39	52	51	--
40. Sam Houston.....	40	40	--	--
41. Masaharu Funaki....	51	--	--	--
42. Samson Fuyuki.....	--	--	--	--
43. Tom Prichard.....	54	--	--	--
44. Terry Taylor.....	18	18	29	65
45. Atlantis.....	--	--	--	--
46. Dan Kroffatt.....	--	--	--	--
47. Kuniaki Kobayashi..	47	16	20	32
48. Jerry Lawler.....	63	63	61	57
49. Ashura Hara.....	70	--	--	--
50. Ken Wayne.....	--	--	--	--
51. Stan Hansen.....	37	26	4	9
52. Steve Williams....	34	14	38	--
53. Buzz Sawyer.....	33	17	50	47
54. Jason the Terrible..	64	--	--	--
55. Jeff Jarrett.....	49	--	--	--
56. Shawn Michaels.....	61	--	--	--
57. Terry Funk.....	41	15	52	50
58. Tito Santana.....	60	--	--	--
59. Chavo Guerrero.....	--	24	35	22
60. Lizmark.....	--	--	--	--
61. Michael Hayes.....	--	68	56	--
62. Yoshiaki Yatsu.....	40	4	19	30
63. Danny Davis.....	--	--	--	--
64. Road Warrior Hawk..	75	--	--	--
65. Paul Diamond.....	--	--	--	--
66. Mark Rocco.....	--	35	24	42
67. Mando Guerrero.....	--	--	--	--
Jerry Estrada.....	--	--	--	--

	87	86	85	84
69. Shinichi Nakano.....	--	--	--	--
70. Johnny Smith.....	--	--	--	--
71. Ricky Morton.....	23	21	54	--
Dynamite Kid.....	--	29	2	2
73. Hector Guerrero.....	53	57	47	--
74. Brian Pillman.....	72	--	--	--
Manny Fernandez.....	--	--	--	--

Others ranked on two or more ballots:
 Bam Bam Bigelow, Islander Tama, Jerry Morrow, Super Strong Machine, Masa Fuchi, Marty Janetty, Jake Roberts, Davey Boy Smith, Tony Anthony, Pero Aguayo, Tim Horner, Eric Embry, George Takano, Hiro Saito, Samu of Samoan Swat Team

RATINGS NOTES: This year's poll breaks Ric Flair's seven-year run in the No. 1 spot in the poll, however Flair maintains his standard of being the only wrestler in the 10-year history of the poll to be rated in the top five each year. . . . Tatsumi Fujinami received 23 of the 34 first place votes, with Flair getting eight, Owen Hart getting two and Ted DiBiase getting the other one. . . The oldest wrestler in the poll is Masa Saito (46), while the youngest is Masaharu Funaki (19). . . . On the North American side of things, the oldest wrestler in the poll is Terry Funk (44), while the youngest is Chris Benoit (21). . . Tosh Kawada is the highest rated newcomer, finishing in the No.18 position. . . Top finishers last year who didn't repeat this year were: Ricky Steamboat (No. 10), who retired; Bruiser Brody (No. 26), who was murdered in July; Hiroshi Hase (No. 32), who would have easily finished in the top 15 had he not been injured and missed most of the last five months; and Negro Casas (No. 36), who disappeared from the mat scene in Mexico. . . In breaking down the wrestlers by promotion among the top 75, the NWA tops the list with 13 wrestlers, down from 17 at this time last year and 15 in the 1986 poll. The WWF has 11, compared with ten last year and 11 in 1986. New Japan follows with 10 wrestlers, down from 17 last year and 11 in 1986. All Japan follows with nine wrestlers, up from seven last year but they had 11 in 1986. Stampede follows with five wrestlers (four in 1987; one in 1986); Mexico has four wrestlers (four in 1987; five in 1986); England has three wrestlers (none in 1987; one in 1986); while CWF also has three wrestlers (one in 1987, none in 1986). Having two wrestlers each were the AWA (three in 1987, four in 1986); WWC (none in 1987 or 1986) and CWA (four in 1987; three in 1986); while World Class has one (three in 1987, one in 1986). There are also seven unaffiliated wrestlers in the poll: Ricky Morton (travels to several independents and part-time AWA), Chavo, Mando and Hector Guerrero (independents and AWA), Ashura Hara (fired from All Japan toward the end of the year), Ken Wayne (quit CWF at the end of the year) and Terry Funk (basically retired but occasionally works independents).

1988 PRO WRESTLING DIRECTORY

<u>NAME</u>	<u>HT</u>	<u>WT</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>YRS PRO</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>	<u>REAL NAME</u>
<u>-A-</u>						
JOHNNY ACE	6-4	243	23	2	Minneapolis, MN	John Laurinidas
CHRIS ADAMS	6-0	228	33	11	Stratford, Eng.	Chris Adams
BRIAN ADAMS	6-5	288	25	2		Brian Adams
BRIAN ADIAS	6-0	215	28	6	Lake Dallas, TX	Brian Gower
SIVI AFI	5-9½	245	35	15	Honolulu, HI	Max Taogaga
PERO AGUAYO	5-8	190	42	19	Mexico	Don Carmona
AKEEM	6-6	420	28	10	North Carolina	George Gray
GARY ALLBRIGHT	6-5	310	25	1	Billings, MT	Gary Allbright
ARN ANDERSON	6-1½	248	30	7	Rome, GA	Marty Lunde
ANDRE THE GIANT	6-10	510	42	24	Grenoble, France	Andre Rousimoff
YOJI ANJYO	5-10	195	21	3	Tokyo, Japan	Yoji Anjyo
TONY ANTHONY	6-0½	244	28	11	Tennessee	Tony Anthony
DON ARAKAWA	5-7½	205	42	17	Kagoshima, Japan	Makoto Arakawa
TED ARCIDI	5-10	295	30	3	Boston, MA	Ted Arcidi
BRAD ARMSTRONG	5-10	220	27	8	Marietta, GA	Robert James, Jr.
SCOTT ARMSTRONG	5-10	190	29	5	Marietta, GA	Scott James
STEVE ARMSTRONG	6-0½	225	23	4	Marietta, GA	Steve James
CUBAN ASSASSIN	5-5	225			Cuba	Angel Alvedo
RUSSIAN ASSASSIN #1	6-5½	290	33	3	Anaheim, CA	David Sheldon
RUSSIAN ASSASSIN #2	6-3	270	26	4	New Jersey	Ken Rinehurst
SUPER ASTRO	5-4	160	26	6	Mexico	
ATLANTIS	5-7	170	25	6	Mexico	
TONY ATLAS	6-2	270	32	12	Roanoke, VA	Anthony White
AVALANCHE	6-0	400	25	2	Minneapolis, MN	Paul Neu
HERCULES AYALA	5-11	260	40	17	Bayamon, PR	Ruben Ayala
<u>-B-</u>						
GIANT BABA	6-8	255	50	29	Niigata, Japan	Shohei Baba
BOB BACKLUND	6-1	225	38	13	Princeton, MN	Robert Backlund
THE BARBARIAN	6-3½	290	32	8	San Francisco, CA	
NORD THE BARBARIAN	6-6	300	29	4	Anoka, MN	John Nord
DON BASS	5-9	290	42	17		
RON BASS	6-2	285	42	21	Pampa, TX	Ronald Herd
BLACK BART	6-4	275	33	8		Richard Jones
BART BATTEN	5-8½	218	29	6	West Virginia	Bart Batten
BRAD BATTEN	5-8½	218	29	5	West Virginia	Brad Batten
SUPER DAVE BAXTER	5-10	195	22	2	Pensacola, FL	David Baxter
BOTSWANA BEAST	6-0	335	28	2	Georgia	Ben Peacock
BRUTUS BEEFCAKE	6-2	250	31	11	Tampa, FL	Edward Leslie
CHRIS BENOIT	5-9	215	21	3	Edmonton, ALTA	Chris Benoit
BAM BAM BIGELOW	6-2	370	27	3	Asbury Park NJ	Scott Bigelow
BLACKMAN	5-6	160	35	12	Mexico	
STEVE BLACKMAN	6-2	260	25	2	Pittsburgh, PA	Steve Blackman
JERRY BLACKWELL	5-9	420	39	14	Stone Mtn., GA	Jerry Blackwell
BRIAN BLAIR	5-10	228	35	15	Tampa, FL	Brian Blair
TULLY BLANCHARD	5-10	228	34	13	San Antonio, TX	Tully Blanchard
BLUE BLAZER	5-9	225	23	3	Calgary, ALTA	Owen Hart
SCOTTY THE BODY	6-0	227	25	2	Lake Worth, FL	Scott Levy
BRADY BOONE	5-6	205	28	4	Minneapolis, MN	Brady Boone
MATT BORNE	5-10	242	31	10	Milwaukee, OR	Matthew Osborne
BIG BOSSMAN	6-5	355	25	3	Cobb County, GA	Ravmond Traylor
JONATHAN BOYD	5-9	240	44	23	Australia	John Boyd
DINO BRAVO	6-0	260	41	19	Montreal, Quebec	Adolpho Brescino
EL BRAZO	5-7	190	27	11	Mexico	
BRAZO DE ORO	5-6	180	28	12	Mexico	
BRAZO DE PLATA	5-6	225	26	11	Mexico	
KILLER BROOKS	6-0	260	44	21	Dallas, TX	Timothy Brooks
BADNEWS BROWN	6-0	255	46	11	Plainfield, NJ	Allen Coage
BRICKHOUSE BROWN	5-8	195		6	Miami, FL	Ronald Brown
JIM BRUNZELL	5-10	225	39	16	White Bear Lake, MN	James Brunzell
THE BULLET	5-11	230	51	22	Marietta, GA	Robert James, Sr.
ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER	6-0	430	52	31	Windsor, ONT	Larry Shreeve
<u>-C-</u>						
LARRY CAMERON	6-2	265	36	1	Minneapolis, MN	Larry Cameron
RAY CANDY	6-4	400	37	15	Atlanta, GA	Raymond Canty
EL CANEK	6-0	235	36	16	Mexico	
DOS CARAS	5-10	215	37	18	Mexico	Miguel Rodriguez
NEGRO CASAS	5-6	185	27	9	Mexico	
SCOTT CASEY	5-10	245	41	17	San Antonio, TX	Scott Casey
STEVE CASEY	6-4½	242	25	8	London, England	Steve Casey
STEVEN CASEY	5-10	227	24	3	San Antonio, TX	
CHRIS CHAMPION	5-11	215	28	5	Tampa, FL	David Smith
TODD CHAMPION	6-5	280	27	3	Provo, UT	Todd Brafford
SANGRE CHICANA	5-9	185	36	15	Mexico	Andres Richardsor
MASA CHONO	5-10	218	25	4	Tokyo, Japan	Masahiro Chono
RIKI CHOSHU	5-10	238	37	15	Tokuyama, Japan	Mitsuo Yoshida
TIGER CHUNG LEE	6-2	250	40	21	South Korea	Masanori Toguchi
CARLOS COLON	5-9	215	43	23	San Juan, PR	Carlitos Colon

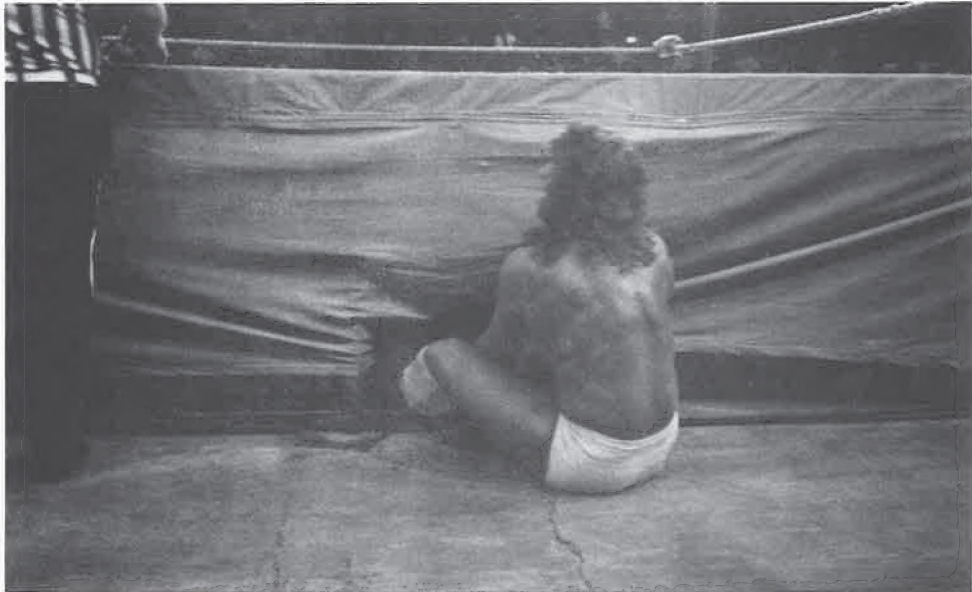
NAME	HT	WT	AGE	YRS PRO	HOMETOWN	REAL NAME
DENNIS CONDREY	6-0	250	36	15	Nashville, TN	Dennis Condrey
WENDELL COOLEY	5-10	220	27	6	Milton, FL	Wendell Cooley
STEVE COX	6-0	237	27	2	Tulsa, OK	Steve Cox
ART CREWS	6-0	243	29	8	Kansas City, MO	Arthur Crews
-D-						
DANDY	5-8	170	26	8	Mexico	
DANNY DAVIS (WWF)	5-11	215		5	Dover, NH	Daniel Davis
DANNY DAVIS (CWF)	5-6	205		11		Danny Davis
MIKE DAVIS	6-0	215	32	11		Mike Davis
HOSS DEATON	6-2	270	33	7	Charlotte, NC	David Jones
JOEL DEATON	6-2	238	31	5	Charlotte, NC	Joseph Jones
COLONEL DEBEERS	6-4	270	45	18	St. Joseph, MO	William Wiskoski
AXE DEMOLITION	6-2	280		17		William Eadie
DETROIT DEMOLITION	6-2	285	38			Randy Collins
SMASH DEMOLITION	6-3	295	29	6	Minneapolis, MN	Barry Darsow
THE DESTROYER	5-9	210	57	35	Akron, NY	Richard Beyer
STEVE DOLL	5-11	215	24	4	Dallas, TX	
PAUL DIAMOND	5-11	215	27	5	Thunder Bay, ONT	Thomas Boric
TED DIBIASE	6-3½	258	35	15	Jackson, MS	Ted DiBiase
STEVE DISALVO	6-1	290	33	3	Los Angeles, CA	Steve DiSalvo
JUNKFOOD DOG	6-2½	315	36	10	Baton Rouge, LA	Sylvester Ritter
CHIC DONOVAN	5-11	230	41	10	Augusta, GA	Charles Donovan
SHANE DOUGLAS	5-11	215	24	2	Pittsburgh, PA	Troy Martin
HACKSAW JIM DUGGAN	6-3	295	35	11	Glens Falls, NY	James Duggan
DERRICK DUKES	6-1	230	24	1	Minneapolis, MN	Derrick Dukes
BILL DUNDEE	5-5	205		17	Melbourne, Aus.	William Dundee
-E-						
BOBBY EATON	6-0	238	30	13	Huntsville, AL	Bobby Lee Eaton
JERRY ESTRADA	5-9	170	30	11	Mexico	Jerry Estrada
JOSE ESTRADA	5-11	235	42	12	New York, NY	Carlos Estrada
-F-						
BABY FACE	5-5	205	38	19	Mexico	
MANNY FERNANDEZ	6-0	250	34	10	San Jose, CA	Manuel Fernandez
LA FIERA	5-8	170	27	11	Mexico	Alfredo Casco
FISHMAN	5-7	180	37	19	Mexico	
RIC FLAIR	6-0	233	38	16	Charlotte, NC	Richard Fliehr
MASA FUCHI	5-10	218	34	15	Kitakyushu, Japan	Masanobu Fuchi
ROBERT FULLER	6-4	248	37	18	Dyresburg, TN	Robert Welch
RON FULLER	6-7	270	39	20	Dyresburg, TN	Ronald Welch
BOBBY FULTON	5-9	215	27	8	Chillicothe, OH	James Hines
TATSUMI FUJINAMI	5-9	238	35	18	Masashi, Japan	Tatsumi Fujinami
YOSHIAKI FUJIWARA	5-11	220	39	16	Iwate, Japan	
MASAHARU FUNAKI	5-11	195	19	4	Aomori, Japan	Masaharu Funaki
DORY FUNK	6-2	245	47	26	Dundellon, FL	Dory Funk
TERRY FUNK	6-1	220	44	23	Canyon, TX	Terry Funk
DOUG FURNAS	5-9	260	27	2	Knoxville, TN	Doug Furnas
SAMSON FUYUKI	5-9	205	28	9	Tokyo, Japan	Masamichi Fuyuki
-G-						
GREG GAGNE	5-10	190	40	16	Mound, MN	Greg Gagne
JIMMY GARVIN	5-11	220	34	13	Tampa, FL	James Williams
RONNIE GARVIN	5-10	220	45	26	Montreal, Quebec	Roger Barnes
MIKE GEORGE	5-11	260	40	19	St. Joseph, MO	Michael George
ROBERT GIBSON	6-1	229	31	11	Pensacola, FL	Ruben Kane
EDDIE GILBERT	5-9	210	28	11	Lexington, TN	Thomas Gilbert, Jr
RYUMA GO	5-9½	237	32	17	Tokyo, Japan	Ryuma Go
JIMMY GOLDEN	6-5	245	38	20	Montgomery, AL	James Golden
MIKE GOLDEN	6-0	235	30	8	Shawnee, OK	Michael Golden
TERRY GORDY	6-4	275	27	13	Chattanooga, TN	Terry Gordy
TATSUTOSHI GOTO	5-10	209	32	16	Aichi, Japan	Tatsutoshi Goto
MIKE GRAHAM	5-5	190	37	17	Tampa, FL	Michael Gossett
THE GRAPPLER	5-10	235		10		Len Denton
JERRY GRAY	5-11	238	25	8	Orlando, FL	Jerry Gray
CHAVO GUERRERO	5-8	210	38	15	El Paso, TX	Salvador Guerrero
EDDIE GUERRERO	5-9	185	20	2	El Paso, TX	Edouardo Geurrero
MANDO GUERRERO	5-6	195	34	14	El Paso, TX	Armando Guerrero
HECTOR GUERRERO	5-11	215	31	11	El Paso, TX	Hector Guerrero
TOP GUN	6-0	235		9	Tampa, FL	David Sierra
-H-						
KING HAKU	6-1	252	29	11	Tonga Islands	Uliuli Fifita
SCOTT HALL	6-5	275	29	5	Orlando, FL	Scott Hall
EL GRAN HAMADA	5-4	175	38	17	Tokyo, Japan	Hiroaki Hamada
STAN HANSEN	6-2½	288	39	16	Jackson, TN	John Hansen
ASHURA HARA	5-10	240	41	12	Nagasaki, Japan	Susuma Hara
BRET HART	6-0	228	31	12	Calgary, ALTA	Bret Hart
BRUCE HART	5-8	205	36	18	Calgary, ALTA	Bruce Hart
HIROSHI HASE	5-11	215	27	3	Yokohama, Japan	Hiroshi Hase
SHINYA HASHIMOTO	5-9	260	23	4	Gifu, Japan	Shinya Hashimoto
MICHAEL HAYES	6-2	245	29	12	Pensacola, FL	Michael Seitz
RICK HAZZARD	5-6	205	28	5	Dallas, TX	Rick Hazard

<u>NAME</u>	<u>HT</u>	<u>WT</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>YRS</u>	<u>PRO</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>	<u>REAL NAME</u>
CURT HENNIG	6-2½	245	30	9		Robbinsdale, MN	Curt Hennig
HERCULES	6-2	260	31	9		Tampa, FL	Ray Fernandez
WILLIE B. HERT	5-9	250	37	15		Chattanooga, TN	Pez Whatley
PHIL HICKERSON	5-9	285	41	18		Jackson, TN	Phil Hickerson
HULK HOGAN	6-5	295	35	11		Tampa, FL	Terry Bollea
NORIO HONAGA	5-9	200	32	9		Tokyo, Japan	Nobuo Honaga
HONKEYTONK MAN	6-1	248	35	11		Bolivar, TN	Wayne Ferris
TIM HORNER	5-9	215	29	9		Morristown, TN	Tim Horner
BARRY HOROWITZ	5-10	225	28	6		West Palm Beach, FL	Barry Horowitz
KANTARO HOSHINO	5-4	165	45	28		Kobe, Japan	Kantaro Hoshino
SAM HOUSTON	6-3	225	24	6		Denton, TX	Michael Smith
SPIKE HUBER	5-10	230	33	14		Indianapolis, IN	Michael Huber
					-I-		
AUSTIN IDOL	6-0	235	37	17		Pensacola, FL	Dennis McCord
LANCE IDOL	6-2	240	30	11		Stockton, CA	Steve Schumann
ANTONIO INOKI	6-0½	210	45	28		Yokohama, Japan	Antonio Inoki
WILD BILL IRWIN	6-1	260	36	15		Duluth, MN	Barney Irwin
TAKASHI ISHIKAWA	5-9	225	35	11		Yamagata, Japan	Takashi Ishikawa
					-J-		
MIKE JACKSON	5-7	168	40	20		Birmingham, AL	Michael Jackson
BOBBY JAGGERS	6-0	275	41	21		Dunlap, KS	Robert Jeadouin
MARTY JANETTY	5-10	225	26	6		Columbus, GA	Marty Janetty
JEFF JARRETT	5-10	205	21	3		Hendersonville, TN	Jeff Jarrett
JASON THE TERRIBLE	6-4	275	30	10		Calgary, ALTA	Karl Moffatt
HILLBILLY JIM	6-5	280	31	6		Bowling Green, KY	James Morris
ROCKY JOHNSON	6-0	275	44	24		Honolulu, HI	Drew Glasteau
MARTY JONES	5-10	200	32	11		Lancashire, Eng.	Martin Jones
RUFUS JONES	5-10	270	47	26		Kansas City, MO	Rufus Lloyd
S.D. JONES	6-1	255	43	26		Philadelphia, PA	Conrad Efrain
COUSIN JUNIOR	6-1	290	29	6		Jamestown, KY	Lanny Kean
					-K-		
THE GREAT KABUKI	5-10	230	40	24		Miyazaki, Japan	Akihisa Mera
TOSHIAKI KAWADA	5-9½	210	25	7		Tichigi, Japan	Toshiaki Kawada
TEIJO KHAN	6-0	243	28	3		Minneapolis, MN	Tom Cassett
STEVE KEIRN	6-0	230	37	15		Tampa, FL	Steve Keirn
KEVIN KELLY	6-3	278	29	5		Minneapolis, MN	Kevin Wacholz
DYNAMITE KID	5-8	205	30	15		Calgary, ALTA	Tom Billington
OSAMU KIDO	5-8	205	38	20		Kawasaki, Japan	Osamu Kido
KIMALA	6-5	370	38	14		San Antonio, TX	James Harris
KENGO KIMURA	6-0	230	35	17		Ehime, Japan	Takashi Kimura
RUSHER KIMURA	5-11	245	47	24		Hokkaido, Japan	Masao Kimura
COLONEL KIRCHNER	6-2	249	28	5		Miami, FL	Michael Kirchner
KENTA KOBASHI	5-10	218	21	1		Tokyo, Japan	Kenta Kobashi
KUNIAKI KOBAYASHI	5-10	218	32	15		Nagano, Japan	Kuniaki Kobayashi
IVAN KOLOFF	5-9	240	52	27		Montreal, Quebec	James Parris
NIKITA KOLOFF	6-2	238	29	5		Minneapolis, MN	Scott Simpson
SHIRO KOSHINAKA	5-10	217	30	10		Tokyo, Japan	Shiro Koshinaka
DAN KROFFATT	6-0	230	25	6		Calgary, ALTA	Dan Kroffatt
					-L-		
FRANKIE LANCASTER	6-1	239	28	6		Atlanta, GA	Frank Lancaster
BUDDY LANDEL	6-0	235	27	9		Knoxville, TN	William Landel
STAN LANE	6-0	235	35	11		Myrtle Beach, SC	Stan Lane
TOMMY LANE	5-9	225	33	6			Tommy Lane
JERRY LAWLER	5-10	234	39	18		Memphis, TN	Jerry Lawler
BRIAN LEE	6-4	250		1		Orlando, FL	
JOS LEDUC	6-1	270	43	24		Montreal, Quebec	Jos LeDuc
MISSING LINK	6-1	250	50	24		Hamilton, Ontario	Byron Robertson
LIZMARK	5-7	165	38	13		Mexico	
LEX LUGER	6-3	255	30	3		Tampa, FL	Larry Pfohl
					-M-		
SUPER STRONG MACHINE	6-0	250	32	11		Kanagawa, Japan	Junji Hirata
AL MADRIL	6-0	235	37	17		San Bernardino, CA	Al Madril
AKIRA MAEDA	6-3	238	29	11		Osaka, Japan	Akira Maeda
TOM MAGEE	6-5	275	26	3		Vancouver, BC	Tom Magee
DEAN MALENKO	5-8½	190	28	7		Tampa, FL	Dean Simon
JOE MALENKO	5-9½	200	32	11		Tampa, FL	Joe Simon
CACTUS JACK MANSON	6-2	250		1		Pittsburgh, PA	Michael Foley
DUTCH MANTELL	5-11	235	36	14		Birmingham, AL	Wayne Cowan
RICK MARTEL	5-11	235	32	17		Quebec City, Que	Richard Vignault
MIL MASCARAS	5-11	230	50	24		Mexico City	Aaron Rodriguez
WAHOO MCDANIEL	6-0	270	50	27		Midland, TX	Edward McDaniel
BUGSY MCGRAW	6-2	265	47	28		Indianapolis, IN	Michael Davis
SHAWN MICHAELS	6-0	225	23	5		San Antonio, TX	Shawn Michaels
BUTCH MILLER	5-8	238	44	21		Australia	Robert Miller
MIKE MILLER	6-2	255	37	10		Portland, OR	Mike Miller
MOD SQUAD BASHER	5-11	235	28	4		Anderson, SC	Jim Jefferson
MOD SQUAD SPIKE	5-11	260	29	4		Anderson, SC	David Jefferson
THE MOONDOG	5-11	260	36	13		Nashville, TN	Larry Booker
MOONDOG SPIKE	6-0	250				Nashville, TN	Bill Smithson

NAME	HT	WT	AGE	YRS PRO	HOMETOWN	REAL NAME
MOONDOG MORETTI	5-7	250	31	14	San Francisco, CA	Ed Giovanetti
PIRATA MORGAN	5-8	185	26	9	Mexico	Ramon Morgan
JERRY MORROW	6-0	232	39	18	Martinique	Jerry Morrow
RICKY MORTON	5-9	205	32	10	Nashville, TN	Richard Morton
DON MURACO	6-2	280	40	19	Honolulu, HI	Don Muraco
DICK MURDOCH	6-3	270	43	24	Amarillo, TX	Richard Murdoch
-N-						
KENDO NAGASAKI	6-0	240	40	18	Abashiri, Japan	Kazuo Sakurada
SHINICHI NAKANO	5-9	205	25	8	Niigata, Japan	Shinichi Nakano
NEGRO NAVARRO	5-7	170	33	14	Mexico	
RIKKI NELSON	5-9½	205	23	2	Knoxville, TX	
JIM NEIDHART	6-0	270	33	10	Los Angeles, CA	James Neidhart
SUPER BLACK NINJA	6-1	235	26	4	Tokyo, Japan	Keiji Muto
BRIAN NOBBS	6-2	270	24	2	Allentown, PA	Brian Nobbs
-O-						
RIP OLIVER	6-0	245	36	13	Hemasossa, FL	Richard Oliver
ATSUSHI ONITA	5-9½	205	31	12	Tokyo, Japan	Atsushi Onita
BOB ORTON	6-3	265	38	18	Tampa, FL	Robert Orton, Jr.
-P-						
ICEMAN KING PARSONS	5-9	230	39	9	St. Louis, MO	King Parsons
JOHN PAUL	5-11	225	25	3	Edina, MN	John Demann
AL PEREZ	6-1	239	28	7	Tampa, FL	Alex Perez
D.J. PETERSON	6-1	242	25	4	St. Joseph, MO	David Peterson
DARRYL PETERSON	6-5	310	26	2	Salt Lake City, UT	Darryl Peterson
SCOTT PETERSON	6-3	238	25	2	Salt Lake City, UT	Scott Peterson
BRIAN PILLMAN	5-10	220	26	2	Norwood, OH	Brian Pillman
LANNY POFFO	6-0	243	34	15	Tampa, FL	Lanny Poffo
MR. POGO	5-11	239	37	17	Yamanashi, Japan	Tetsuo Sekigawa
JIM POWERS	5-10	220	25	4	New Jersey	
TOM PRICHARD	5-9	220	29	10	Houston, TX	Tom Prichard
-R-						
HARLEY RACE	6-0	238	45	29	Leawood, KS	Harley Race
STEVE REGAL	6-0	205	33	11	Indianapolis, IN	Steve Regal
BRAD RHEINGANS	5-9	235	35	8	Appleton, WI	Brad Rheingans
RICKY RICE	6-1	230	25	2	Edina, MN	Ricky Rice
DAVEY RICH	6-0	235	29	7	Memphis, TN	David Haskins
JOHNNY RICH	6-0	220	28	7	Hendersonville, TN	John Richardson
TOMMY RICH	6-0	243	32	14	Hendersonville, TN	Tom Richardson
DUSTIN RHODES	6-5	260	19	1	Austin, TX	Dustin Runnels
DUSTY RHODES	6-0	330	43	23	Austin, TX	Virgil Runnels
ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL	6-0	290	29	6	Minneapolis, MN	Joe Laurinidas
ROAD WARRIOR HAWK	6-2½	280	31	6	Minneapolis, MN	Michael Hegstrand
JAKE ROBERTS	6-5	255	33	12	Stone Mtn., GA	Aurelian Smith
MARK ROCCO	5-8	190	37	17	England	Mark Hussey
GOLDIE ROGERS	5-10	200	38	16		David Sherwin
RIP ROGERS	6-0	220	33	10	Seymour, IN	
TOMMY ROGERS	5-8	195	27	8	St. Petersburg, FL	Thomas Couch
PAUL ROMA	5-9	218	28	6	Kensington, NY	
BUDDY ROSE	5-11	355	39	15	Minneapolis, MN	Paul Perschmann
RANDY ROSE	6-1	230	37	14	Atlanta, GA	
MIKE ROTUNDA	6-2	243	30	7	Syracuse, NY	Lawrence Rotunda
JACQUES ROUGEAU	6-2	215	28	12	Montreal, Quèbec	Jacques Rougeau
RAYMOND ROUGEAU	6-0	230	33	18	Montreal, Quebec	Raymond Rougeau
NELSON ROYAL	5-8	225	57	33	Mooreville, NC	Nelson Royal
RICK RUDE	6-4	235	30	5	Minneapolis, MN	Richard Rood
-S-						
JERRY SAGGS	6-3	260	24	2	Allentown, PA	Jerry Seganovich
TONY ST. CLAIR	6-1	210	38	21	England	Tony St. Clair
HIRO SAITO	5-8	230	27	11	Kawasaki, Japan	Hiroyuki Saito
MASA SAITO	5-11	250	46	24	Tokyo, Japan	Masanori Saito
SEIJI SAKAGUCHI	6-5	283	46	22	Fukuoka, Japan	Seiji Sakaguchi
DAVID SAMMARTINO	5-9	212	29	10	Pittsburgh, PA	David Sammartino
AFA THE WILD SAMOAN	6-1	305	45	19	San Francisco, CA	Afa Anoaia
COCOA SAMOA	5-7	225	34	11	Honolulu, HI	John Reiher
SAMOAN SWAT TEAM FATU	6-1	260	22	3	San Francisco, CA	Solofa Fatu
KOKINA THE WILD SAMOAN	6-3	400	22	4	San Francisco, CA	Kokina Anoaia
SAMOAN SWAT TEAM SAMU	6-3	280	25	7	San Francisco, CA	Samula Anoaia
SIKA THE WILD SAMOAN	6-0	295	43	19	San Francisco, CA	Sika Anoaia
TAMA THE WILD SAMOAN	6-0	235	23	5	San Francisco, CA	Sam Fatu
RICKY SANTANA	5-10	230	23	6	Miami, FL	Aldo Ortiz
TITO SANTANA	6-2½	235	34	12	Mission, TX	Merced Solis
EL HIJO DEL SANTO	5-3	145	25	6	Mexico	Rudolfo Huerta, Jr
KENSUKE SASAKI	5-9	205	22	3	Japan	Kensuke Sasaki
SHINJI SASAZAKI	5-10	227	23	5	Nagasaki, Japan	Shinji Sasazaki
EL SATANICO	5-8	170	39	15	Mexico	
AKIO SATO	5-8	208	34	18	Hokkaido, Japan	Akio Sato
RANDY SAVAGE	6-1	230	36	14	Downers Grove, IL	Randy Poffo
JOE SAVOLDI	5-9	210	31	8	Parsippany, NJ	Joe Farini

NAME	HT	WT	AGE	YRS	PRO	HOMETOWN	REAL NAME
BRETT SAWYER	5-5	210	28	8		St. Petersburg, FL	Brett Moyan
BUZZ SAWYER	5-9	260	29	10		St. Petersburg, FL	Bruce Moyan
MIKE SHARPE	6-2	250	38	15		Hamilton, ONT	Mike Sharpe, Jr.
IRON SHEIK	6-0	270	49	16		Teheran, Iran	Khosrow Vaziri
DAVID SHULTS	6-4	260	38	13		Nashville, TN	David Shults
EL SIGNO	5-5	185	35	13		Mexico	
RON SIMMONS	6-0	270	29	2		Warner-Robbins, GA	Ron Simmons
SCHUAN SIMPSON	5-9	195	22	2		Cape Town, SA	Schaun Cohen
STEVE SIMPSON	6-0	205	25	5		Cape Town, SA	Steven Cohen
GAMA SINGH	5-10	225					
MAKHAN SINGH	6-0	375	31	10		Saginaw, MI	Michael Shaw
TIGER JEET SINGH	6-0	245	45	24		Toronto, ONT	Daro Singh, Jr.
DICK SLATER	6-0	235	36	17		Tampa, FL	Van Slater
SGT. SLAUGHTER	6-2	315	40	16		Wilmar, CT	Robert Remus
NORMAN SMILEY	5-11	218	23	4		Miami Beach, FL	Norman Smiley
DAVEY BOY SMITH	5-10	250	26	11		Calgary, ALTA	David Smith
JOHNNY SMITH	5-10	235	21	3		Calgary, ALTA	
TRACY SMOTHERS	6-2	230	25	6		Springfield, TN	Tracy Smothers
MITCH SNOW	5-8	205	22	3		Mooreville, NC	Barton Snow
JIMMY SNUKA	5-10	250	45	19		Honolulu, HI	James Reiher
DOUG SOMERS	6-2	237	38	17		Minneapolis, MN	Doug Somerson
J.T. SOUTHERN	6-2	237	27	3		Asbury Park NJ	
DANNY SPIVEY	6-7	295	32	5		Tampa, FL	Daniel Spivey
ITALIAN STALLION	5-11	255	31	6		Ann Arbor, MI	Gary Quartanelli
MARK STARR	6-1	230	24	3		Tampa, FL	Mark Smith
RON STARR	5-10	230	38	20		Baton Rouge, LA	Eugene Nutt
RICKY STEAMBOAT	5-10	220	35	13		Tampa, FL	Richard Blood
VIC STEAMBOAT	5-10	210	27	3		Tampa, FL	Victor Blood
U.S. STEELE	6-7	385	32	4		Huntington, WV	Fred Ottman
ADRIAN STREET	5-6	215	47	27		England	Adrian Street
RICK STEINER	5-10	255	27	4		Bay City, MI	Rob Rechsteiner
SCOTT STEINER	5-11	235	26	3		Bay City, MI	Scott Rechsteiner
RAY STEVENS	5-9	255	54	40		Fairfield, MT	Carl Stevens
STING	6-2	248	29	3		Los Angeles, CA	Steven Borden
JERRY STUBBS	5-11	235	38	14		Pensacola, FL	Jerry Stubbs
BIG JOHN STUDD	6-6½	320	40	17		Butler, PA	John Minton
KEVIN SULLIVAN	5-6	248	39	19		Boston, MA	Kevin Sullivan
-T-							
NOBUHIKO TAKADA	5-11	224	26	8		Yokohama, Japan	Nobuhiko Takada
ISAO TAKAGI	6-0	238	27	2		Tokyo, Japan	Isao Takagi
GEORGE TAKANO	6-0	239	30	12		Iwakuni, Japan	Gyoji Takano
SHUNJI TAKANO	6-4	238	24	7		Iwakuni, Japan	Shunji Takano
ABDULLAH TAMBA	5-9	270	38	20		Mexico	Raul Tamba
PAT TANAKA	5-7	190	25	3		Tampa, FL	Patric Tanaka
AKIRA TAUE	6-1	230	27	1		Tokyo, Japan	Akira Taue
TERRY TAYLOR	6-0	230	33	10		Vero Beach, FL	Paul Taylor
GENICHIRO TENRYU	6-1	253	38	12		Katsuyama, Japan	Genichiro Shimade
BIG JOHN TENTA	6-6	385	25	2		Surrey, BC	John Tenta
THE TERMINATOR	6-0	255	22	2		Minneapolis, MN	Marc Laurinidas
EL TEXANO	5-6	175	30	13		Mexico	
TIGER MASK	5-11	225	26	8		Saitama, Japan	Mitsuhara Misawa
KEN TIMBS	5-11	235	37	9		Atlanta, GA	Ken Timbs
TNT	5-11	237	23	4		San Juan, PR	
COWBOY TONY	6-0	235	27	14		Nashville, TN	Anthony Felker
JUMBO TSURUTA	6-4	265	37	16		Yamanashi, Japan	Tomomi Tsuruta
GORO TSURUMI	5-11	260	40	18		Yokohama, Japan	Goro Tsurumi
-U-							
ULTRAMAN	5-6	160	37	19		Mexico	
SOLDAT USTINOV	6-5	280	26	2		Minneapolis, MN	Jim Lanning
-V-							
BIG VAN VADER	6-3	335	32	3		Boulder, CO	Leon White
GREG VALENTINE	6-0	248	40	20		Seattle, WA	John Wisniski, Jr.
JIMMY VALIANT	6-1	245	46	20		Chicago, IL	James Valen
SID VICIOUS	6-7	295	28	2		West Memphis, AK	Sidney Eudy
VILLANO III	5-7	175	36	18		Mexico	Ray Mendoza, Jr.
VIRGIL	5-11	233	26	3		Washington, DC	Michael Jones
NIKOLAI VOLKOFF	6-3	280	41	21		Yugoslavia	Josip Peruzovic
KEVIN VON ERICH	6-2	220	31	13		Lake Dallas, TX	Kevin Adkisson
KERRY VON ERICH	6-1½	265	28	11		Lake Dallas, TX	Kerry Adkisson
-W-							
HIROSHI WAJIMA	6-0	250	41	2		Ishikawa, Japan	Hiroshi Wajima
OTTO WANZ	6-2	395	46	20		Austria	Otto Wanz
KOKO B. WARE	5-6	220	30	13		Union City, TN	James Ware
THE WARLORD	6-5	335	26	3		Minneapolis, MN	Terry Szopinski
ULTIMATE WARRIOR	6-2	275	30	3		Atlanta, GA	James Hellwig
KEN WAYNE	5-6	200		11		Nashville, TN	
BIFF WELLINGTON	5-11	215	24	2		Lethbridge, ALTA	Shane Bower
LUKE WILLIAMS	5-10	230	41	16		Australia	Brian Wicker
STEVE WILLIAMS	6-1	280	28	7		Lakewood, CO	Steve Williams
BARRY WINDHAM	6-5½	258	28	9		Sweetwater, TX	Barry Windham

NAME	HT	WT	AGE	YRS	PRO	HOMETOWN	REAL NAME
KENDALL WINDHAM	6-5	225	21	3		Sweetwater, TX	Kendall Windham
MR. WRESTLING II	5-9½	220	56	36		Atlanta, GA	Johnny Walker
STEVE WRIGHT	5-11	195	41	20		England	Stephen Wright
-Y-							
KEIICHI YAMADA	5-4	197	24	5		Hiroshima, Japan	Keiichi Yamada
KAZUO YAMAZAKI	5-10	215	26	7		Tokyo, Japan	Kazuo Yamazaki
YOSHIAKI YATSU	6-0	260	32	8		Gunma, Japan	Yoshiaki Yatsu
GARY YOUNG	6-0	230	37	11		Houston, TX	Gary Young
SKIP YOUNG	5-9	225	32	13		Fort Worth, TX	Galton Young
CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD	6-0	220	21	3		Amarillo, TX	Chris Romero
MARK YOUNGBLOOD	6-0	238	25	8		Amarillo, TX	Mark Romero
-Z-							
LARRY ZBYSZKO	5-9	230	35	16		Pittsburgh, PA	Larry Whistler
TOM ZENK	6-1	235	28	5		Minneapolis, MN	Tom Zenk
BORIS ZHUKOV	6-2	280	32	9		Roanoke, VA	James Darrell
*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
MANAGERS, VALETS AND WOMEN WRESTLERS							
SCANDOR AKBAR	5-8	248	52	32		Vernon, TX	Jim Wehba
LIONESS ASUKA	5-5	140	25	9			Tomoko Kitamura
DOWNTOWN BRUNO	5-7	130	25	4		Pittsburgh, PA	Bruno Lauer
DEBBIE COMBS	5-7	145	30	10		Nashville, TN	
JIM CORNETTE	6-0	225	27	6		Louisville, KY	Jim Cornette
PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY	5-10	185	23	2		Scarsdale, NY	Paul Heyman
CANDI DIVINE	5-7	135		8		Nashville, TN	
BABY DOLL	6-0	145	26	5		Lubbock, TX	Nickla Smith
J.J. DILLON	6-2	255	48	19		Atlantic City, NJ	James Morrison
ELIZABETH	5-4	100		4		Lexington, KY	Liz Hewlitt-Poffo
PAUL ELLERING	5-9	205	36	11		Mellrose, MN	Paul Ellering
MR. FUJI	5-11	280	52	29		Honolulu, HI	Harry Fujiwara
LOLA GONZALES	5-7	140	28	11		Mexico City	Lola Gonzales
GARY HART	6-0	250	50	30		Dallas, TX	Gary Williams
JIMMY HART	6-0	160	45	10		Memphis, TN	Jimmy Hart
BOBBY HEENAN	6-0	245	45	22		Tampa, FL	Raymond Heenan
YUMIKO HOTTA	5-5	140	21	4			Yumiko Hotta
SIR OLIVER HUMPERDINK	5-10	270	38	15		Montreal	John Sutton
MISSY HYATT	5-8	120	25	4		Tallahassee, FL	Melissa Gilbert
PAUL JONES	5-9	225	45	26		Houston, TX	Paul Fredrick
LEILANI KAI	5-7	155					Patty Karisma
SHEIK KAISSEY	5-10	245	56	29		Turkey	Adnon Kaisy
SHINOBU KANDORI	5-7	138	24	3			Shinobu Kandori
MIKA KOMATSU	5-3	114	21	6			Mika Komatsu
MADUSA MACELI	5-7	138	24	2		Minneapolis, MN	Debbie Maceli
JUDY MARTIN	5-7	165					Judy Martin
DEVIL MASAMI	5-6	170	27	11			Tenjin Masami
SHIZUKA MINAMI	5-7	125	19	5			Mika Suzuki
CHIGUSA NAGAYO	5-5	135	24	9			Chigusa Nagayo
BULL NAKANO	5-7	160	20	6			
YUMI OGURA	5-2	125	21	6			Yumi Ogura
PRECIOUS	5-3	100		5		Tampa, FL	Patty Williams
PERCY PRINGLE	5-10	245	34	13		Mobile, AL	
DYNAMITE QUEEN	5-5	150	23	4			Megumi Nakamae
WENDI RICHTER	5-7½	135	28	11		Dallas, TX	Wendi Richter
ROCKIN ROBIN	5-7	120	23	1		Denton, TX	Robin Smith
SENSATIONAL SHERRI	5-7	138	30	6		New Orleans, LA	Sherri Martel
SLICK	6-4	170		3		Dallas, TX	Ken Johnson
PANTERA SURENA	5-3	140	36				
NORIYO TATENO	5-3	135	23	8			Noriyo Tateno
RONALD A. TRUMP	5-8	160		1			Ben Ryan
ITSUKI YAMAZAKI	5-3½	125	23	8			Itsuki Yamazaki
ABDUL WIZAL	5-1	125		1		Calgary, ALTA	Mohad Zein



• Autographs •



Photos by Dave Katz



RING WORMS

A Tribute To Wrestling's Bad Guys

Keith Franke, "Adrin Adonis"
1954-1988

WWF World Tag Team Champion, AWA World Tag Team Champion, New Japan Int. Tagteam Champion, SWCW World Champion, 1981 Most Improved Wrestler, 1982 Most Underrated Wrestler.